

# PD SHORT STORIES

## OCTOBER 2017



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## **ANNE MARIE AND JEANNE MARIE**

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Balcony Stories*, by Grace E. King

Old Jeanne Marie leaned her hand against the house, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. She had not wept since she buried her last child. With her it was one trouble, one weeping, no more; and her wrinkled, hard, polished skin so far had known only the tears that come after death. The trouble in her heart now was almost exactly like the trouble caused by death; although she knew it was not so bad as death, yet, when she thought of this to console herself, the tears rolled all the faster. She took the end of the red cotton kerchief tied over her head, and wiped them away; for the furrows in her face did not merely run up and down--they ran in all directions, and carried her tears all over her face at once. She could understand death, but she could not understand this.

It came about in this way: Anne Marie and she lived in the little red-washed cabin against which she leaned; had lived there alone with each other for fifty years, ever since Jeanne Marie's husband had died, and the three children after him, in the fever epidemic.

The little two-roomed cabin, the stable where there used to be a cow, the patch of ground planted with onions, had all been bought and paid for by the husband; for he was a thrifty, hard-working Gascon, and had he lived there would not have been one better off, or with a larger family, either in that quarter or in any of the red-washed suburbs with which Gascony has surrounded New Orleans. His women, however,--the wife and sister-in-law,--had done their share in the work: a man's share apiece, for with the Gascon women there is no discrimination of sex when it comes to work.

And they worked on just the same after he died, tending the cow, digging, hoeing, planting, watering. The day following the funeral, by daylight Jeanne Marie was shouldering around the yoke of milk-cans to his patrons, while Anne Marie carried the vegetables to market; and so on for fifty years.

They were old women now,--seventy-five years old,--and, as they expressed it, they had always been twins. In twins there is always one lucky and one unlucky one: Jeanne Marie was the lucky one, Anne Marie the unlucky one. So much so, that it was even she who had to catch the rheumatism, and to lie now bedridden, months at a time, while Jeanne Marie was as active in her sabots as she had ever been.

In spite of the age of both, and the infirmity of one, every Saturday night there was some little thing to put under the brick in the hearth, for taxes and license, and the never-to-be-forgotten funeral provision. In the husband's time gold pieces used to go in, but they had all gone to pay for the four funerals and the quadrupled doctor's bill. The women laid in silver pieces; the coins, however, grew smaller and smaller, and represented more and more not so much the gain from onions as the saving from food.

It had been explained to them how they might, all at once, make a year's gain in the lottery; and it had become their custom always, at the end of every month, to put aside one silver coin apiece, to buy a lottery ticket with--one ticket each, not for the great, but for the twenty-five-cent, prizes. Anne Marie would buy hers round about the market; Jeanne Marie would stop anywhere along her milk course and buy hers, and they would go together in the afternoon to stand with the little crowd watching the placard upon which the winning numbers were to be written. And when they were written, it was curious, Jeanne Marie's numbers would come out twice as often as Anne Marie's. Not that she ever won anything, for she was not lucky enough to have them come out in the order to win; they only came out here and there, singly: but it was sufficient to make old Anne Marie cross and ugly for a day or two, and injure the sale of the onion-basket. When she became bedridden, Jeanne Marie bought the ticket for both, on the numbers, however, that Anne Marie gave her; and Anne Marie had to lie in bed and wait, while Jeanne Marie went out to watch the placard.

One evening, watching it, Jeanne Marie saw the ticket-agent write out the numbers as they came on her ticket, in such a way that they drew a prize--forty dollars.

When the old woman saw it she felt such a happiness; just as she used to feel in the old times right after the birth of a baby. She thought of that instantly. Without saying a word to any one, she clattered over the \_banquette\_ as fast as she could in her sabots, to tell the good news to Anne Marie. But she did not go so fast as not to have time to dispose of her forty dollars over and over again. Forty dollars! That was a great deal of money. She had often in her mind, when she was expecting a prize, spent twenty dollars; for she had never thought it could be more than that. But forty dollars! A new gown apiece, and black silk kerchiefs to tie over their heads instead of red cotton, and the little cabin new red-washed, and soup in the pot, and a garlic sausage, and a bottle of good, costly liniment for Anne Marie's legs; and still a pile of gold to go under the hearth-brick--a pile of gold that would have made the eyes of the defunct husband glisten.

She pushed open the picket-gate, and came into the room where her sister lay in bed.

"Eh, Anne Marie, my girl," she called in her thick, pebbly voice, apparently made purposely to suit her rough Gascon accent; "this time we have caught it!"

"Whose ticket?" asked Anne Marie, instantly.

In a flash all Anne Marie's ill luck ran through Jeanne Marie's mind; how her promised husband had proved unfaithful, and Jeanne Marie's faithful; and how, ever since, even to the coming out of her lottery numbers, even to the selling of vegetables, even to the catching of the rheumatism, she had been the loser. But above all, as she looked at Anne Marie in the bed, all the misery came over Jeanne Marie of her sister's not being able, in all her poor old seventy-five years of life, to remember the pressure of the arms of a husband about her waist, nor the mouth of a child on her breast.

As soon as Anne Marie had asked her question, Jeanne Marie answered

it.

"But your ticket, \_Coton-Maï!\_"[1]

[Footnote 1: \_Coton-Maï\_ is an innocent oath invented by the good, pious priest as a substitute for one more harmful.]

"Where? Give it here! Give it here!"

The old woman, who had not been able to move her back for weeks, sat bolt upright in bed, and stretched out her great bony fingers, with the long nails as hard and black as rake-prongs from groveling in the earth.

Jeanne Marie poured the money out of her cotton handkerchief into them.

Anne Marie counted it, looked at it; looked at it, counted it; and if she had not been so old, so infirm, so toothless, the smile that passed over her face would have made it beautiful.

Jeanne Marie had to leave her to draw water from the well to water the plants, and to get her vegetables ready for next morning. She felt even happier now than if she had just had a child, happier even than if her husband had just returned to her.

"Ill luck! \_Coton-Maï!\_ Ill luck! There's a way to turn ill luck!"  
And her smile also should have beautified her face, wrinkled and ugly though it was.

She did not think any more of the spending of the money, only of the pleasure Anne Marie would take in spending it.

The water was low in the well, and there had been a long drought. There are not many old women of seventy-five who could have watered so much ground as abundantly as she did; but whenever she thought of the

forty dollars and Anne Marie's smile she would give the thirsting plant an extra bucketful.

The twilight was gaining. She paused. "\_Coton-Maï\_" she exclaimed aloud. "But I must see the old woman smile again over her good luck."

Although it was "my girl" face to face, it was always "the old woman" behind each other's back.

There was a knot-hole in the plank walls of the house. In spite of Anne Marie's rheumatism they would never stop it up, needing it, they said, for light and air. Jeanne Marie slipped her feet out of her sabots and crept easily toward it, smiling, and saying "\_Coton-Maï\_" to herself all the way. She put her eye to the hole. Anne Marie was not in the bed, she who had not left her bed for two months! Jeanne Marie looked through the dim light of the room until she found her.

Anne Marie, in her short petticoat and nightsack, with bare legs and feet, was on her knees in the corner, pulling up a plank, hiding--peasants know hiding when they see it--hiding her money away--away--away from whom?--muttering to herself and shaking her old grayhaired head. Hiding her money away from Jeanne Marie!

And this was why Jeanne Marie leaned her head against the side of the house and wept. It seemed to her that she had never known her twin sister at all.

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## THE MAN WITHOUT A TEMPERAMENT

Project Gutenberg's *Bliss, and Other Stories*, by Katherine Mansfield

HE stood at the hall door turning the ring, turning the heavy signet ring upon his little finger while his glance travelled coolly, deliberately, over the round tables and basket chairs scattered about the glassed-in verandah. He pursed his lips--he might have been going to whistle--but he did not whistle--only turned the ring--turned the ring on his pink, freshly washed hands.

Over in the corner sat The Two Topknots, drinking a decoction they always drank at this hour--something whitish, greyish, in glasses, with little husks floating on the top--and rooting in a tin full of paper shavings for pieces of speckled biscuit, which they broke, dropped into the glasses and fished for with spoons. Their two coils of knitting, like two snakes, slumbered beside the tray.

The American Woman sat where she always sat against the glass wall, in the shadow of a great creeping thing with wide open purple eyes that pressed--that flattened itself against the glass, hungrily watching her. And she knoo it was there--she knoo it was looking at her just that way. She played up to it; she gave herself little airs. Sometimes she even pointed at it, crying: "Isn't that the most terrible thing you've ever seen! Isn't that ghoulish!" It was on the other side of the verandah, after all . . . and besides it couldn't touch her, could it, Klaymongso? She was an American Woman, wasn't she Klaymongso, and she'd just go right away to her Consul. Klaymongso, curled in her lap, with her torn antique brocade bag, a grubby handkerchief, and a pile of letters from home on top of him, sneezed for reply.

The other tables were empty. A glance passed between the American and the Topknots. She gave a foreign little shrug; they waved an understanding biscuit. But he saw nothing. Now he was still, now from his eyes you saw he listened. "Hoo-e-zip-zoo-oo!" sounded the lift. The iron cage clanged open. Light dragging steps sounded across the hall, coming towards him. A hand, like a leaf, fell on his shoulder. A soft voice said: "Let's go and sit over there--where we can see the drive. The trees are so lovely." And he moved forward with the hand still on his shoulder, and the light, dragging steps beside his. He pulled out a chair and she sank into it, slowly, leaning her head against the back, her arms falling along the sides.

"Won't you bring the other up closer? It's such miles away." But he did not move.

"Where's your shawl?" he asked.

"Oh!" She gave a little groan of dismay. "How silly I am, I've left it upstairs on the bed. Never mind. Please don't go for it. I shan't want it, I know I shan't."

"You'd better have it." And he turned and swiftly crossed the verandah into the dim hall with its scarlet plush and gilt furniture--conjurer's furniture--its Notice of Services at the English Church, its green baize board with the unclaimed letters climbing the black lattice, huge "Presentation" clock that struck the hours at the half-hours, bundles of sticks and umbrellas and sunshades in the clasp of a brown wooden bear, past the two crippled palms, two ancient beggars at the foot of the staircase, up the marble stairs three at a time, past the life-size group on the landing of two stout peasant children with their marble pinnies full of marble grapes, and along the corridor, with its piled-up wreckage of old tin boxes, leather trunks, canvas hold-alls, to their room.

The servant girl was in their room, singing loudly while she emptied soapy water into a pail. The windows were open wide, the shutters put back, and the light glared in. She had thrown the carpets and the big white pillows over the balcony rails; the nets were looped up from the beds; on the writing table there stood a pan of fluff and match-ends. When she saw him her small impudent eyes snapped and her singing changed to humming. But he gave no sign. His eyes searched the glaring room. Where the devil was the shawl!

"\_Vous desirez, Monsieur?\_" mocked the servant girl.

No answer. He had seen it. He strode across the room, grabbed the grey cobweb and went out, banging the door. The servant girl's voice at its loudest and shrillest followed him along the corridor.

"Oh, there you are. What happened? What kept you? The tea's here, you see. I've just sent Antonio off for the hot water. Isn't it extraordinary? I must have told him about it sixty times at least, and still he doesn't bring it. Thank you. That's very nice. One does just



feel the air when one bends forward."

"Thanks." He took his tea and sat down in the other chair. "No, nothing to eat."

"Oh do! Just one, you had so little at lunch and it's hours before dinner."

Her shawl dropped off as she bent forward to hand him the biscuits. He took one and put it in his saucer.

"Oh, those trees along the drive," she cried, "I could look at them for ever. They are like the most exquisite huge ferns. And you see that one with the grey-silver bark and the clusters of cream coloured flowers, I pulled down a head of them yesterday to smell and the scent"--she shut her eyes at the memory and her voice thinned away, faint, airy--"was like freshly ground nutmegs." A little pause. She turned to him and smiled. "You do know what nutmegs smell like--do you, Robert?"

And he smiled back at her. "Now how am I going to prove to you that I do?"

Back came Antonio with not only the hot water--with letters on a salver and three rolls of paper.

"Oh, the post! Oh, how lovely! Oh, Robert, they mustn't be all for you! Have they just come, Antonio?" Her thin hands flew up and hovered over the letters that Antonio offered her, bending forward.

"Just this moment, Signora," grinned Antonio. "I took-a them from the postman myself. I made-a the postman give them for me."

"Noble Antonio!" laughed she. "There--those are mine, Robert; the rest are yours."

Antonio wheeled sharply, stiffened, the grin went out of his face. His

striped linen jacket and his flat gleaming fringe made him look like a wooden doll.

Mr. Salesby put the letters into his pocket; the papers lay on the table. He turned the ring, turned the signet ring on his little finger and stared in front of him, blinking, vacant.

But she--with her teacup in one hand, the sheets of thin paper in the other, her head tilted back, her lips open, a brush of bright colour on her cheek-bones, sipped, sipped, drank . . . drank. . . .

"From Lottie," came her soft murmur. "Poor dear . . . such trouble . . . left foot. She thought . . . neuritis . . . Doctor Blyth . . . flat foot . . . massage. So many robins this year . . . maid most satisfactory . . . Indian Colonel . . . every grain of rice separate . . . very heavy fall of snow." And her wide lighted eyes looked up from the letter. "Snow, Robert! Think of it!" And she touched the little dark violets pinned on her thin bosom and went back to the letter.

. . . Snow. Snow in London. Millie with the early morning cup of tea. "There's been a terrible fall of snow in the night, Sir." "Oh, has there, Millie?" The curtains ring apart, letting in the pale, reluctant light. He raises himself in the bed; he catches a glimpse of the solid houses opposite framed in white, of their window boxes full of great sprays of white coral. . . . In the bathroom--overlooking the back garden. Snow--heavy snow over everything. The lawn is covered with a wavy pattern of cat's paws; there is a thick, thick icing on the garden table; the withered pods of the laburnum tree are white tassels; only here and there in the ivy is a dark leaf showing. . . . Warming his back at the dining-room fire, the paper drying over a chair. Millie with the bacon. "Oh, if you please, Sir, there's two little boys come as will do the steps and front for a shilling, shall I let them?" . . . And then flying lightly, lightly down the stairs--Jinnie. "Oh, Robert, isn't it wonderful! Oh, what a pity it

has to melt. Where's the pussy-wee?" "I'll get him from Millie" . . .  
"Millie, you might just hand me up the kitten if you've got him down there." "Very good, Sir." He feels the little beating heart under his hand. "Come on, old chap, your Missus wants you." "Oh, Robert, do show him the snow--his first snow. Shall I open the window and give him a little piece on his paw to hold? . . ."

"Well, that's very satisfactory on the whole--very. Poor Lottie! Darling Anne! How I only wish I could send them something of this," she cried, waving her letters at the brilliant, dazzling garden. "More tea, Robert? Robert dear, more tea?"

"No, thanks, no. It was very good," he drawled.

"Well mine wasn't. Mine was just like chopped hay. Oh, here comes the Honeymoon Couple."

Half striding, half running, carrying a basket between them and rods and lines, they came up the drive, up the shallow steps.

"My! have you been out fishing?" cried the American Woman.

They were out of breath, they panted: "Yes, yes, we have been out in a little boat all day. We have caught seven. Four are good to eat. But three we shall give away. To the children."

Mrs. Salesby turned her chair to look; the Topknots laid the snakes down. They were a very dark young couple--black hair, olive skin, brilliant eyes and teeth. He was dressed "English fashion" in a flannel jacket, white trousers and shoes. Round his neck he wore a silk scarf; his head, with his hair brushed back, was bare. And he kept mopping his forehead, rubbing his hands with a brilliant handkerchief. Her white skirt had a patch of wet; her neck and throat were stained a deep pink. When she lifted her arms big half-hoops of perspiration showed under her arm-pits; her hair clung in wet curls to

her cheeks. She looked as though her young husband had been dipping her in the sea, and fishing her out again to dry in the sun and then--in with her again--all day.

"Would Klaymongso like a fish?" they cried. Their laughing voices charged with excitement beat against the glassed-in verandah like birds, and a strange saltish smell came from the basket.

"You will sleep well to-night," said a Topknot, picking her ear with a knitting needle while the other Topknot smiled and nodded.

The Honeymoon Couple looked at each other. A great wave seemed to go over them. They gasped, gulped, staggered a little and then came up laughing--laughing.

"We cannot go upstairs, we are too tired. We must have tea just as we are. Here--coffee. No--tea. No--coffee. Tea--coffee, Antonio!" Mrs. Salesby turned.

"Robert! Robert!" Where was he? He wasn't there. Oh, there he was at the other end of the verandah, with his back turned, smoking a cigarette. "Robert, shall we go for our little turn?"

"Right." He stumped the cigarette into an ash-tray and sauntered over, his eyes on the ground. "Will you be warm enough?"

"Oh, quite."

"Sure?"

"Well," she put her hand on his arm, "perhaps"--and gave his arm the faintest pressure--"it's not upstairs, it's only in the hall--perhaps you'd get me my cape. Hanging up."

He came back with it and she bent her small head while he dropped it on her shoulders. Then, very stiff, he offered her his arm. She bowed sweetly to the people on the verandah while he just covered a yawn,

and they went down the steps together.

"\_Vous avez voo ça!\_" said the American Woman.

"He is not a man," said the Two Topknots, "he is an ox. I say to my sister in the morning and at night when we are in bed, I tell her--\_No\_ man is he, but an ox!"

Wheeling, tumbling, swooping, the laughter of the Honeymoon Couple dashed against the glass of the verandah.

The sun was still high. Every leaf, every flower in the garden lay open, motionless, as if exhausted, and a sweet, rich, rank smell filled the quivering air. Out of the thick, fleshy leaves of a cactus there rose an aloe stem loaded with pale flowers that looked as though they had been cut out of butter; light flashed upon the lifted spears of the palms; over a bed of scarlet waxen flowers some big black insects "zoom-zoomed"; a great, gaudy creeper, orange splashed with jet, sprawled against a wall.

"I don't need my cape after all," said she. "It's really too warm." So he took it off and carried it over his arm. "Let us go down this path here. I feel so well to-day--marvellously better. Good heavens--look at those children! And to think it's November!"

In a corner of the garden there were two brimming tubs of water. Three little girls, having thoughtfully taken off their drawers and hung them on a bush, their skirts clasped to their waists, were standing in the tubs and tramping up and down. They screamed, their hair fell over their faces, they splashed one another. But suddenly, the smallest, who had a tub to herself, glanced up and saw who was looking. For a moment she seemed overcome with terror, then clumsily she struggled and strained out of her tub, and still holding her clothes above her waist. "The Englishman! The Englishman!" she shrieked and fled away to hide. Shrieking and screaming, the other two followed her. In a moment they were gone; in a moment there was nothing but the two brimming tubs and their little drawers on the bush.

"How--very--extraordinary!" said she. "What made them so frightened? Surely they were much too young to . . ." She looked up at him. She thought he looked pale--but wonderfully handsome with that great tropical tree behind him with its long, spiked thorns.

For a moment he did not answer. Then he met her glance, and smiling his slow smile, "\_Très\_ rum!" said he.

\_Très\_ rum! Oh, she felt quite faint. Oh, why should she love him so much just because he said a thing like that. \_Très\_ rum! That was Robert all over. Nobody else but Robert could ever say such a thing. To be so wonderful, so brilliant, so learned, and then to say in that queer, boyish voice. . . . She could have wept.

"You know you're very absurd, sometimes," said she.

"I am," he answered. And they walked on.

But she was tired. She had had enough. She did not want to walk any more.

"Leave me here and go for a little constitutional, won't you? I'll be in one of these long chairs. What a good thing you've got my cape; you won't have to go upstairs for a rug. Thank you, Robert, I shall look at that delicious heliotrope. . . . You won't be gone long?"

"No--no. You don't mind being left?"

"Silly! I want you to go. I can't expect you to drag after your invalid wife every minute. . . . How long will you be?"

He took out his watch. "It's just after half-past four. I'll be back at a quarter past five."

"Back at a quarter past five," she repeated, and she lay still in the long chair and folded her hands.

He turned away. Suddenly he was back again. "Look here, would you like my watch?" And he dangled it before her.

"Oh!" She caught her breath. "Very, very much." And she clasped the watch, the warm watch, the darling watch in her fingers. "Now go quickly."

The gates of the Pension Villa Excelsior were open wide, jammed open against some bold geraniums. Stooping a little, staring straight ahead, walking swiftly, he passed through them and began climbing the hill that wound behind the town like a great rope looping the villas together. The dust lay thick. A carriage came bowling along driving towards the Excelsior. In it sat the General and the Countess; they had been for his daily airing. Mr. Salesby stepped to one side but the dust beat up, thick, white, stifling like wool. The Countess just had time to nudge the General.

"There he goes," she said spitefully.

But the General gave a loud caw and refused to look.

"It is the Englishman," said the driver, turning round and smiling. And the Countess threw up her hands and nodded so amiably that he spat with satisfaction and gave the stumbling horse a cut.

On--on--past the finest villas in the town, magnificent palaces, palaces worth coming any distance to see, past the public gardens with the carved grottoes and statues and stone animals drinking at the fountain, into a poorer quarter. Here the road ran narrow and foul between high lean houses, the ground floors of which were scooped and hollowed into stables and carpenters' shops. At a fountain ahead of him two old hags were beating linen. As he passed them they squatted back on their haunches, stared, and then their "A-hak-kak-kak!" with the slap, slap, of the stone on the linen sounded after him.

He reached the top of the hill; he turned a corner and the town was

hidden. Down he looked into a deep valley with a dried up river bed at the bottom. This side and that was covered with small dilapidated houses that had broken stone verandahs where the fruit lay drying, tomato lanes in the garden, and from the gates to the doors a trellis of vines. The late sunlight, deep, golden, lay in the cup of the valley; there was a smell of charcoal in the air. In the gardens the men were cutting grapes. He watched a man standing in the greenish shade, raising up, holding a black cluster in one hand, taking the knife from his belt, cutting, laying the bunch in a flat boat-shaped basket. The man worked leisurely, silently, taking hundreds of years over the job. On the hedges on the other side of the road there were grapes small as berries, growing wild, growing among the stones. He leaned against a wall, filled his pipe, put a match to it. . . .

Leaned across a gate, turned up the collar of his mackintosh. It was going to rain. It didn't matter, he was prepared for it. You didn't expect anything else in November. He looked over the bare field. From the corner by the gate there came the smell of swedes, a great stack of them, wet, rank coloured. Two men passed walking towards the straggling village. "Good day!" "Good day!" By Jove! he had to hurry if he was going to catch that train home. Over the gate, across a field, over the stile, into the lane, swinging along in the drifting rain and dusk. . . . Just home in time for a bath and a change before supper. . . . In the drawing-room; Jinnie is sitting pretty nearly in the fire. "Oh, Robert, I didn't hear you come in. Did you have a good time? How nice you smell! A present?" "Some bits of blackberry I picked for you. Pretty colour." "Oh, lovely, Robert! Dennis and Beaty are coming to supper." Supper--cold beef, potatoes in their jackets, claret, household bread. They are gay--everybody's laughing. "Oh, we all know Robert," says Dennis, breathing on his eyeglasses and polishing them. "By the way, Dennis, I picked up a very jolly little edition of . . ."



A clock struck. He wheeled sharply. What time was it. Five? A quarter past? Back, back the way he came. As he passed through the gates he saw her on the look-out. She got up, waved and slowly she came to meet him, dragging the heavy cape. In her hand she carried a spray of heliotrope.

"You're late," she cried gaily. "You're three minutes late. Here's your watch, it's been very good while you were away. Did you have a nice time? Was it lovely? Tell me. Where did you go?"

"I say--put this \_on\_," he said, taking the cape from her.

"Yes, I will. Yes, it's getting chilly. Shall we go up to our room?"

When they reached the lift she was coughing. He frowned.

"It's nothing. I haven't been out too late. Don't be cross." She sat down on one of the red plush chairs while he rang and rang, and then, getting no answer, kept his finger on the bell.

"Oh, Robert, do you think you ought to?"

"Ought to what?"

The door of the \_salon\_ opened. "What is that? Who is making that noise?" sounded from within. Klaymongso began to yelp. "Caw! Caw! Caw!" came from the General. A Topknot darted out with one hand to her ear, opened the staff door, "Mr. Queet! Mr. Queet!" she bawled. That brought the manager up at a run.

"Is that you ringing the bell, Mr. Salesby? Do you want the lift? Very good, Sir. I'll take you up myself. Antonio wouldn't have been a minute, he was just taking off his apron----" And having ushered them in, the oily manager went to the door of the \_salon.\_ "Very sorry you should have been troubled, ladies and gentlemen." Salesby stood in the cage, sucking in his cheeks, staring at the ceiling and turning the ring, turning the signet ring on his little finger. . . .

Arrived in their room he went swiftly over to the washstand, shook the bottle, poured her out a dose and brought it across.

"Sit down. Drink it. And don't talk." And he stood over her while she obeyed. Then he took the glass, rinsed it and put it back in its case. "Would you like a cushion?"

"No, I'm quite all right. Come over here. Sit down by me just a minute, will you, Robert? Ah, that's very nice." She turned and thrust the piece of heliotrope in the lapel of his coat. "That," she said, "is most becoming." And then she leaned her head against his shoulder, and he put his arm round her.

"Robert----" her voice like a sigh--like a breath.

"Yes----"

They sat there for a long while. The sky flamed, paled; the two white beds were like two ships. . . . At last he heard the servant girl running along the corridor with the hot water cans, and gently he released her and turned on the light.

"Oh, what time is it? Oh, what a heavenly evening. Oh, Robert, I was thinking while you were away this afternoon . . ."

They were the last couple to enter the dining-room. The Countess was there with her lorgnette and her fan, the General was there with his special chair and the air cushion and the small rug over his knees. The American Woman was there showing Klaymongso a copy of the \_Saturday Evening Post.\_ . . . "We're having a feast of reason and a flow of soul." The Two Topknots were there feeling over the peaches and the pears in their dish of fruit, and putting aside all they considered unripe or overripe to show to the manager, and the Honeymoon Couple leaned across the table, whispering, trying not to burst out laughing.

Mr. Queet, in everyday clothes and white canvas shoes, served the soup, and Antonio, in full evening dress, handed it round.

"No," said the American Woman, "take it away, Antonio. We can't eat soup. We can't eat anything mushy, can we, Klaymongso?"

"Take them back and fill them to the rim!" said the Topknots, and they turned and watched while Antonio delivered the message.

"What is it? Rice? Is it cooked?" The Countess peered through her lorgnette. "Mr. Queet, the General can have some of this soup if it is cooked."

"Very good, Countess."

The Honeymoon Couple had their fish instead.

"Give me that one. That's the one I caught. No it's not. Yes, it is. No it's not. Well, it's looking at me with its eye so it must be. Tee! Hee! Hee!" Their feet were locked together under the table.

"Robert, you're not eating again. Is anything the matter?"

"No. Off food, that's all."

"Oh, what a bother. There are eggs and spinach coming. You don't like spinach, do you. I must tell them in future . . ."

An egg and mashed potatoes for the General.

"Mr. Queet! Mr. Queet!"

"Yes, Countess."

"The General's egg's too hard again."

"Caw! Caw! Caw!"

"Very sorry, Countess. Shall I have you another cooked, General?"

. . . They are the first to leave the dining-room. She rises, gathering her shawl and he stands aside, waiting for her to pass, turning the ring, turning the signet ring on his little finger. In the hall Mr. Queet hovers. "I thought you might not want to wait for the lift. Antonio's just serving the finger bowls. And I'm sorry the bell won't ring, it's out of order. I can't think what's happened."

"Oh, I do hope . . ." from her.

"Get in," says he.

Mr. Queet steps after them and slams the door. . . .

. . . "Robert, do you mind if I go to bed very soon? Won't you go down to the \_salon\_ or out into the garden? Or perhaps you might smoke a cigar on the balcony. It's lovely out there. And I like cigar smoke. I always did. But if you'd rather . . ."

"No, I'll sit here."

He takes a chair and sits on the balcony. He hears her moving about in the room, lightly, lightly, moving and rustling. Then she comes over to him. "Good night, Robert."

"Good night." He takes her hand and kisses the palm. "Don't catch cold."

The sky is the colour of jade. There are a great many stars; an enormous white moon hangs over the garden. Far away lightning flutters--flutters like a wing--flutters like a broken bird that tries to fly and sinks again and again struggles.

The lights from the \_salon\_ shine across the garden path and there is the sound of a piano. And once the American Woman, opening the French

window to let Klaymongso into the garden, cries: "Have you seen this moon?" But nobody answers.

He gets very cold sitting there, staring at the balcony rail. Finally he comes inside. The moon--the room is painted white with moonlight. The light trembles in the mirrors; the two beds seem to float. She is asleep. He sees her through the nets, half sitting, banked up with pillows, her white hands crossed on the sheet. Her white cheeks, her fair hair pressed against the pillow, are silvered over. He undresses quickly, stealthily and gets into bed. Lying there, his hands clasped behind his head. . . .

. . . In his study. Late summer. The Virginia creeper just on the turn. . . .

"Well, my dear chap, that's the whole story. That's the long and the short of it. If she can't cut away for the next two years and give a decent climate a chance she don't stand a dog's--h'm--show. Better be frank about these things." "Oh, certainly. . . ." "And hang it all, old man, what's to prevent you going with her? It isn't as though you've got a regular job like us wage earners. You can do what you do wherever you are----" "Two years." "Yes, I should give it two years. You'll have no trouble about letting this house you know. As a matter of fact . . ."

. . . He is with her. "Robert, the awful thing is--I suppose it's my illness--I simply feel I could not go alone. You see--you're everything. You're bread and wine, Robert, bread and wine. Oh, my darling--what am I saying? Of course I could, of course I won't take you away. . . ."

He hears her stirring. Does she want something?

"Boogles?"

Good Lord! She is talking in her sleep. They haven't used that name for years.

"Boogles. Are you awake?"

"Yes, do you want anything?"

"Oh, I'm going to be a bother. I'm so sorry. Do you mind? There's a wretched mosquito inside my net--I can hear him singing. Would you catch him? I don't want to move because of my heart."

"No, don't move. Stay where you are." He switches on the light, lifts the net. "Where is the little beggar? Have you spotted him?"

"Yes, there, over by the corner. Oh, I do feel such a fiend to have dragged you out of bed. Do you mind dreadfully?"

"No, of course not." For a moment he hovers in his blue and white pyjamas. Then, "got him," he said.

"Oh, good. Was he a juicy one?"

"Beastly." He went over to the washstand and dipped his fingers in water. "Are you all right now? Shall I switch off the light?"

"Yes, please. No. Boogles! Come back here a moment. Sit down by me. Give me your hand." She turns his signet ring. "Why weren't you asleep? Boogles, listen. Come closer. I sometimes wonder--do you mind awfully being out here with me?"

He bends down. He kisses her. He tucks her in, he smooths the pillow.

"Rot!" he whispers.

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## TWO GALLANTS

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Dubliners*, by James Joyce

THE grey warm evening of August had descended upon the city and a mild warm air, a memory of summer, circulated in the streets. The streets, shuttered for the repose of Sunday, swarmed with a gaily coloured crowd. Like illumined pearls the lamps shone from the summits of their tall poles upon the living texture below which, changing shape and hue unceasingly, sent up into the warm grey evening air an unchanging unceasing murmur.

Two young men came down the hill of Rutland Square. One of them was just bringing a long monologue to a close. The other, who walked on the verge of the path and was at times obliged to step on to the road, owing to his companion's rudeness, wore an amused listening face. He was squat and ruddy. A yachting cap was shoved far back from his forehead and the narrative to which he listened made constant waves of expression break forth over his face from the corners of his nose and eyes and mouth. Little jets of wheezing laughter followed one another out of his convulsed body. His eyes, twinkling with cunning enjoyment, glanced at every moment towards his companion's face. Once or twice he rearranged the light waterproof which he had slung over one shoulder in toreador fashion. His breeches, his white rubber shoes and his jauntily slung waterproof expressed youth. But his figure fell into rotundity at the waist, his hair was scant and grey and his face, when the waves of expression had passed over it, had a ravaged look.

When he was quite sure that the narrative had ended he laughed noiselessly for fully half a minute. Then he said:

"Well!... That takes the biscuit!"

His voice seemed winnowed of vigour; and to enforce his words he added with humour:

"That takes the solitary, unique, and, if I may so call it, recherche

biscuit!"

He became serious and silent when he had said this. His tongue was tired for he had been talking all the afternoon in a public-house in Dorset Street. Most people considered Lenehan a leech but, in spite of this reputation, his adroitness and eloquence had always prevented his friends from forming any general policy against him. He had a brave manner of coming up to a party of them in a bar and of holding himself nimbly at the borders of the company until he was included in a round. He was a sporting vagrant armed with a vast stock of stories, limericks and riddles. He was insensitive to all kinds of discourtesy. No one knew how he achieved the stern task of living, but his name was vaguely associated with racing tissues.

"And where did you pick her up, Corley?" he asked.

Corley ran his tongue swiftly along his upper lip.

"One night, man," he said, "I was going along Dame Street and I spotted a fine tart under Waterhouse's clock and said good-night, you know. So we went for a walk round by the canal and she told me she was a slavey in a house in Baggot Street. I put my arm round her and squeezed her a bit that night. Then next Sunday, man, I met her by appointment. We went out to Donnybrook and I brought her into a field there. She told me she used to go with a dairyman.... It was fine, man. Cigarettes every night she'd bring me and paying the tram out and back. And one night she brought me two bloody fine cigars--O, the real cheese, you know, that the old fellow used to smoke.... I was afraid, man, she'd get in the family way. But she's up to the dodge."

"Maybe she thinks you'll marry her," said Lenehan.

"I told her I was out of a job," said Corley. "I told her I was in Pim's. She doesn't know my name. I was too hairy to tell her that. But she thinks I'm a bit of class, you know."

Lenehan laughed again, noiselessly.



"Of all the good ones ever I heard," he said, "that emphatically takes the biscuit."

Corley's stride acknowledged the compliment. The swing of his burly body made his friend execute a few light skips from the path to the roadway and back again. Corley was the son of an inspector of police and he had inherited his father's frame and gait. He walked with his hands by his sides, holding himself erect and swaying his head from side to side. His head was large, globular and oily; it sweated in all weathers; and his large round hat, set upon it sideways, looked like a bulb which had grown out of another. He always stared straight before him as if he were on parade and, when he wished to gaze after someone in the street, it was necessary for him to move his body from the hips. At present he was about town. Whenever any job was vacant a friend was always ready to give him the hard word. He was often to be seen walking with policemen in plain clothes, talking earnestly. He knew the inner side of all affairs and was fond of delivering final judgments. He spoke without listening to the speech of his companions. His conversation was mainly about himself: what he had said to such a person and what such a person had said to him and what he had said to settle the matter. When he reported these dialogues he aspirated the first letter of his name after the manner of Florentines.

Lenehan offered his friend a cigarette. As the two young men walked on through the crowd Corley occasionally turned to smile at some of the passing girls but Lenehan's gaze was fixed on the large faint moon circled with a double halo. He watched earnestly the passing of the grey web of twilight across its face. At length he said:

"Well... tell me, Corley, I suppose you'll be able to pull it off all right, eh?"

Corley closed one eye expressively as an answer.

"Is she game for that?" asked Lenehan dubiously. "You can never know women."

"She's all right," said Corley. "I know the way to get around her, man. She's a bit gone on me."

"You're what I call a gay Lothario," said Lenehan. "And the proper kind of a Lothario, too!"

A shade of mockery relieved the servility of his manner. To save himself he had the habit of leaving his flattery open to the interpretation of raillery. But Corley had not a subtle mind.

"There's nothing to touch a good slavey," he affirmed. "Take my tip for it."

"By one who has tried them all," said Lenehan.

"First I used to go with girls, you know," said Corley, unbosoming; "girls off the South Circular. I used to take them out, man, on the tram somewhere and pay the tram or take them to a band or a play at the theatre or buy them chocolate and sweets or something that way. I used to spend money on them right enough," he added, in a convincing tone, as if he was conscious of being disbelieved.

But Lenehan could well believe it; he nodded gravely.

"I know that game," he said, "and it's a mug's game."

"And damn the thing I ever got out of it," said Corley.

"Ditto here," said Lenehan.

"Only off of one of them," said Corley.

He moistened his upper lip by running his tongue along it. The recollection brightened his eyes. He too gazed at the pale disc of the moon, now nearly veiled, and seemed to meditate.

"She was... a bit of all right," he said regretfully.

He was silent again. Then he added:

"She's on the turf now. I saw her driving down Earl Street one night with two fellows with her on a car."

"I suppose that's your doing," said Lenehan.

"There was others at her before me," said Corley philosophically.

This time Lenehan was inclined to disbelieve. He shook his head to and fro and smiled.

"You know you can't kid me, Corley," he said.

"Honest to God!" said Corley. "Didn't she tell me herself?"

Lenehan made a tragic gesture.

"Base betrayer!" he said.

As they passed along the railings of Trinity College, Lenehan skipped out into the road and peered up at the clock.

"Twenty after," he said.

"Time enough," said Corley. "She'll be there all right. I always let her wait a bit."

Lenehan laughed quietly.

"Ecod! Corley, you know how to take them," he said.

"I'm up to all their little tricks," Corley confessed.

"But tell me," said Lenehan again, "are you sure you can bring it off

all right? You know it's a ticklish job. They're damn close on that point. Eh?... What?"

His bright, small eyes searched his companion's face for reassurance. Corley swung his head to and fro as if to toss aside an insistent insect, and his brows gathered.

"I'll pull it off," he said. "Leave it to me, can't you?"

Lenehan said no more. He did not wish to ruffle his friend's temper, to be sent to the devil and told that his advice was not wanted. A little tact was necessary. But Corley's brow was soon smooth again. His thoughts were running another way.

"She's a fine decent tart," he said, with appreciation; "that's what she is."

They walked along Nassau Street and then turned into Kildare Street. Not far from the porch of the club a harpist stood in the roadway, playing to a little ring of listeners. He plucked at the wires heedlessly, glancing quickly from time to time at the face of each new-comer and from time to time, wearily also, at the sky. His harp, too, heedless that her coverings had fallen about her knees, seemed weary alike of the eyes of strangers and of her master's hands. One hand played in the bass the melody of Silent, O Moyle, while the other hand careered in the treble after each group of notes. The notes of the air sounded deep and full.

The two young men walked up the street without speaking, the mournful music following them. When they reached Stephen's Green they crossed the road. Here the noise of trams, the lights and the crowd released them from their silence.

"There she is!" said Corley.

At the corner of Hume Street a young woman was standing. She wore a blue dress and a white sailor hat. She stood on the curbstone, swinging a

sunshade in one hand. Lenehan grew lively.

"Let's have a look at her, Corley," he said.

Corley glanced sideways at his friend and an unpleasant grin appeared on his face.

"Are you trying to get inside me?" he asked.

"Damn it!" said Lenehan boldly, "I don't want an introduction. All I want is to have a look at her. I'm not going to eat her."

"O... A look at her?" said Corley, more amiably. "Well... I'll tell you what. I'll go over and talk to her and you can pass by."

"Right!" said Lenehan.

Corley had already thrown one leg over the chains when Lenehan called out:

"And after? Where will we meet?"

"Half ten," answered Corley, bringing over his other leg.

"Where?"

"Corner of Merrion Street. We'll be coming back."

"Work it all right now," said Lenehan in farewell.

Corley did not answer. He sauntered across the road swaying his head from side to side. His bulk, his easy pace, and the solid sound of his boots had something of the conqueror in them. He approached the young woman and, without saluting, began at once to converse with her. She swung her umbrella more quickly and executed half turns on her heels. Once or twice when he spoke to her at close quarters she laughed and bent her head.

Lenehan observed them for a few minutes. Then he walked rapidly along beside the chains at some distance and crossed the road obliquely. As he approached Hume Street corner he found the air heavily scented and his eyes made a swift anxious scrutiny of the young woman's appearance. She had her Sunday finery on. Her blue serge skirt was held at the waist by a belt of black leather. The great silver buckle of her belt seemed to depress the centre of her body, catching the light stuff of her white blouse like a clip. She wore a short black jacket with mother-of-pearl buttons and a ragged black boa. The ends of her tulle collarette had been carefully disordered and a big bunch of red flowers was pinned in her bosom stems upwards. Lenehan's eyes noted approvingly her stout short muscular body. Frank rude health glowed in her face, on her fat red cheeks and in her unabashed blue eyes. Her features were blunt. She had broad nostrils, a straggling mouth which lay open in a contented leer, and two projecting front teeth. As he passed Lenehan took off his cap and, after about ten seconds, Corley returned a salute to the air. This he did by raising his hand vaguely and pensively changing the angle of position of his hat.

Lenehan walked as far as the Shelbourne Hotel where he halted and waited. After waiting for a little time he saw them coming towards him and, when they turned to the right, he followed them, stepping lightly in his white shoes, down one side of Merrion Square. As he walked on slowly, timing his pace to theirs, he watched Corley's head which turned at every moment towards the young woman's face like a big ball revolving on a pivot. He kept the pair in view until he had seen them climbing the stairs of the Donnybrook tram; then he turned about and went back the way he had come.

Now that he was alone his face looked older. His gaiety seemed to forsake him and, as he came by the railings of the Duke's Lawn, he allowed his hand to run along them. The air which the harpist had played began to control his movements. His softly padded feet played the melody while his fingers swept a scale of variations idly along the railings after each group of notes.

He walked listlessly round Stephen's Green and then down Grafton Street. Though his eyes took note of many elements of the crowd through which he passed they did so morosely. He found trivial all that was meant to charm him and did not answer the glances which invited him to be bold. He knew that he would have to speak a great deal, to invent and to amuse, and his brain and throat were too dry for such a task. The problem of how he could pass the hours till he met Corley again troubled him a little. He could think of no way of passing them but to keep on walking. He turned to the left when he came to the corner of Rutland Square and felt more at ease in the dark quiet street, the sombre look of which suited his mood. He paused at last before the window of a poor-looking shop over which the words Refreshment Bar were printed in white letters. On the glass of the window were two flying inscriptions: Ginger Beer and Ginger Ale. A cut ham was exposed on a great blue dish while near it on a plate lay a segment of very light plum-pudding. He eyed this food earnestly for some time and then, after glancing warily up and down the street, went into the shop quickly.

He was hungry for, except some biscuits which he had asked two grudging curates to bring him, he had eaten nothing since breakfast-time. He sat down at an uncovered wooden table opposite two work-girls and a mechanic. A slatternly girl waited on him.

"How much is a plate of peas?" he asked.

"Three halfpence, sir," said the girl.

"Bring me a plate of peas," he said, "and a bottle of ginger beer."

He spoke roughly in order to belie his air of gentility for his entry had been followed by a pause of talk. His face was heated. To appear natural he pushed his cap back on his head and planted his elbows on the table. The mechanic and the two work-girls examined him point by point before resuming their conversation in a subdued voice. The girl brought him a plate of grocer's hot peas, seasoned with pepper and vinegar, a fork and his ginger beer. He ate his food greedily and found it so good that he made a note of the shop mentally. When he had eaten all the peas

he sipped his ginger beer and sat for some time thinking of Corley's adventure. In his imagination he beheld the pair of lovers walking along some dark road; he heard Corley's voice in deep energetic gallantries and saw again the leer of the young woman's mouth. This vision made him feel keenly his own poverty of purse and spirit. He was tired of knocking about, of pulling the devil by the tail, of shifts and intrigues. He would be thirty-one in November. Would he never get a good job? Would he never have a home of his own? He thought how pleasant it would be to have a warm fire to sit by and a good dinner to sit down to. He had walked the streets long enough with friends and with girls. He knew what those friends were worth: he knew the girls too. Experience had embittered his heart against the world. But all hope had not left him. He felt better after having eaten than he had felt before, less weary of his life, less vanquished in spirit. He might yet be able to settle down in some snug corner and live happily if he could only come across some good simple-minded girl with a little of the ready.

He paid twopence halfpenny to the slatternly girl and went out of the shop to begin his wandering again. He went into Capel Street and walked along towards the City Hall. Then he turned into Dame Street. At the corner of George's Street he met two friends of his and stopped to converse with them. He was glad that he could rest from all his walking. His friends asked him had he seen Corley and what was the latest. He replied that he had spent the day with Corley. His friends talked very little. They looked vacantly after some figures in the crowd and sometimes made a critical remark. One said that he had seen Mac an hour before in Westmoreland Street. At this Lenehan said that he had been with Mac the night before in Egan's. The young man who had seen Mac in Westmoreland Street asked was it true that Mac had won a bit over a billiard match. Lenehan did not know: he said that Holohan had stood them drinks in Egan's.

He left his friends at a quarter to ten and went up George's Street. He turned to the left at the City Markets and walked on into Grafton Street. The crowd of girls and young men had thinned and on his way up the street he heard many groups and couples bidding one another good-night. He went as far as the clock of the College of Surgeons: it



was on the stroke of ten. He set off briskly along the northern side of the Green hurrying for fear Corley should return too soon. When he reached the corner of Merrion Street he took his stand in the shadow of a lamp and brought out one of the cigarettes which he had reserved and lit it. He leaned against the lamp-post and kept his gaze fixed on the part from which he expected to see Corley and the young woman return.

His mind became active again. He wondered had Corley managed it successfully. He wondered if he had asked her yet or if he would leave it to the last. He suffered all the pangs and thrills of his friend's situation as well as those of his own. But the memory of Corley's slowly revolving head calmed him somewhat: he was sure Corley would pull it off all right. All at once the idea struck him that perhaps Corley had seen her home by another way and given him the slip. His eyes searched the street: there was no sign of them. Yet it was surely half-an-hour since he had seen the clock of the College of Surgeons. Would Corley do a thing like that? He lit his last cigarette and began to smoke it nervously. He strained his eyes as each tram stopped at the far corner of the square. They must have gone home by another way. The paper of his cigarette broke and he flung it into the road with a curse.

Suddenly he saw them coming towards him. He started with delight and, keeping close to his lamp-post, tried to read the result in their walk. They were walking quickly, the young woman taking quick short steps, while Corley kept beside her with his long stride. They did not seem to be speaking. An intimation of the result pricked him like the point of a sharp instrument. He knew Corley would fail; he knew it was no go.

They turned down Baggot Street and he followed them at once, taking the other footpath. When they stopped he stopped too. They talked for a few moments and then the young woman went down the steps into the area of a house. Corley remained standing at the edge of the path, a little distance from the front steps. Some minutes passed. Then the hall-door was opened slowly and cautiously. A woman came running down the front steps and coughed. Corley turned and went towards her. His broad figure hid hers from view for a few seconds and then she reappeared running up the steps. The door closed on her and Corley began to walk swiftly

towards Stephen's Green.

Lenehan hurried on in the same direction. Some drops of light rain fell. He took them as a warning and, glancing back towards the house which the young woman had entered to see that he was not observed, he ran eagerly across the road. Anxiety and his swift run made him pant. He called out:

"Hallo, Corley!"

Corley turned his head to see who had called him, and then continued walking as before. Lenehan ran after him, settling the waterproof on his shoulders with one hand.

"Hallo, Corley!" he cried again.

He came level with his friend and looked keenly in his face. He could see nothing there.

"Well?" he said. "Did it come off?"

They had reached the corner of Ely Place. Still without answering, Corley swerved to the left and went up the side street. His features were composed in stern calm. Lenehan kept up with his friend, breathing uneasily. He was baffled and a note of menace pierced through his voice.

"Can't you tell us?" he said. "Did you try her?"

Corley halted at the first lamp and stared grimly before him. Then with a grave gesture he extended a hand towards the light and, smiling, opened it slowly to the gaze of his disciple. A small gold coin shone in the palm.

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## THE LOST PHOEBE

The Internet Archive E-text of *Free And Other Stories*, by Theodore Dreiser

THEY lived together in a part of the country which was not so prosperous as it had once been, about three miles from one of those small towns that, instead of increasing in population, is steadily decreasing. The territory was not very thickly settled; perhaps a house every other mile or so, with large areas of corn- and wheat-land and fallow fields that at odd seasons had been sown to timothy and clover. Their particular house was part log and part frame, the log portion being the old original home of Henry's grandfather. The new portion, of now rain-beaten, time-worn slabs, through which the wind squeaked in the chinks at times, and which several overshadowing elms and a butternut-tree made picturesque and reminiscently pathetic, but a little damp, was erected by Henry when he was twenty-one and just married.

That was forty-eight years before. The furniture inside, like the house outside, was old and mildewy and reminiscent of an earlier day. You have seen the what-not of cherry wood, perhaps, with spiral legs and fluted top. It was there. The old-fashioned four poster bed, with its ball-like protuberances and deep curving incisions, was there also, a sadly alienated descendant of an early Jacobean ancestor. The bureau of cherry was also high and wide and solidly built, but faded-looking, and with a musty odor. The rag carpet that underlay all these sturdy examples of enduring furniture was a weak, faded, lead-and-pink-colored affair woven by Phoebe Ann's own hands, when she was fifteen years younger than she was when she died. The creaky wooden loom on which it had been

done now stood like a dusty, bony skeleton, along with a broken rocking-chair, a worm-eaten clothes-press — Heaven knows how old — a lime-stained bench that had once been used to keep flowers on outside the door, and other decrepit factors of household utility, in an east room that was a lean-to against this so-called main portion. All sorts of other broken-down furniture were about this place ; an antiquated clothes-horse, cracked in two of its ribs ; a broken mirror in an old cherry frame, which had fallen from a nail and cracked itself three days before their youngest son, Jerry, died ; an extension hat-rack, which once had had porcelain knobs on the ends of its pegs ; and a sewing-machine, long since outdone in its clumsy mechanism by rivals of a newer generation.

The orchard to the east of the house was full of gnarled old apple-trees, worm-eaten as to trunks and branches, and fully ornamented with green and white lichens, so that it had a sad, greenish-white, silvery effect in moonlight. The low outhouses, which had once housed chickens, a horse or two, a cow, and several pigs, were covered with patches of moss as to their roof, and the sides had been free of paint for so long that they were blackish gray as to color, and a little spongy. The picket-fence in front, with its gate squeaky and askew, and the side fences of the stake-and-rider type were in an equally run-down condition. As a matter of fact, they had aged synchronously with the persons who lived here, old Henry Reifsneider and his wife Phoebe Ann.

They had lived here, these two, ever since their marriage, forty-eight years before, and Henry had lived here before that from his childhood up. His father and mother, well along in years when he was a boy, had invited him to bring his wife here when

he had first fallen in love and decided to marry ; and he had done so. His father and mother were the companions of himself and his wife for ten years after they were married, when both died; and then Henry and Phoebe were left with their five children growing lustily apace. But all sorts of things had happened since then. Of the seven children, all told, that had been born to them, three had died; one girl had gone to Kansas; one boy had gone to Sioux Falls, never even to be heard of after; another boy had gone to Washington ; and the last girl lived five counties away in the same State, but was so burdened with cares of her own that she rarely gave them a thought. Time and a commonplace home life that had never been attractive had weaned them thoroughly, so that, wherever they were, they gave little thought as to how it might be with their father and mother.

Old Henry Reifsneider and his wife Phoebe were a loving couple. You perhaps know how it is with simple natures that fasten themselves like lichens on the stones of circumstance and weather their days to a crumbling conclusion. The great world sounds widely, but it has no call for them. They have no soaring intellect. The orchard, the meadow, the corn-field, the pig-pen, and the chicken-lot measure the range of their human activities. When the wheat is headed it is reaped and threshed; when the corn is browned and frosted it is cut and shocked; when the timothy is in full head it is cut, and the hay-cock erected. After that comes winter, with the hauling of grain to market, the sawing and splitting of wood, the simple chores of fire-building, meal-getting, occasional repairing, and visiting. Beyond these and the changes of weather — the snows, the rains, and the fair days — there are no immediate, significant things. All the rest of life is a far-off, clamorous phantasmagoria,

flickering like Northern lights in the night, and sounding as faintly as cow-bells tinkling in the distance.

Old Henry and his wife Phoebe were as fond of each other as it is possible for two old people to be who have nothing else in this life to be fond of. He was a thin old man, seventy when she died, a queer, crotchety person with coarse gray-black hair and beard, quite straggly and unkempt. He looked at you out of dull, fishy, watery eyes that had deep-brown crow's-feet at the sides. His clothes, like the clothes of many farmers, were aged and angular and baggy, standing out at the pockets, not fitting about the neck, protuberant and worn at elbow and knee. Phoebe Ann was thin and shapeless, a very umbrella of a woman, clad in shabby black, and with a black bonnet for her best wear. As time had passed, and they had only themselves to look after, their movements had become slower and slower, their activities fewer and fewer. The annual keep of pigs had been reduced from five to one grunting porker, and the single horse which Henry now retained was a sleepy animal, not over-nourished and not very clean. The chickens, of which formerly there was a large flock, had almost disappeared, owing to ferrets, foxes, and the lack of proper care, which produces disease. The former healthy garden was now a straggling memory of itself, and the vines and flower-beds that formerly ornamented the windows and dooryard had now become choking thickets. A will had been made which divided the small tax-eaten property equally among the remaining four, so that it was really of no interest to any of them. Yet these two lived together in peace and sympathy, only that now and then old Henry would become unduly cranky, complaining almost invariably that something had been neglected or mislaid which was of no importance at all.

"Phoebe, where's my corn-knife? You ain't never minded to let my things alone no more."

\*\*Now you hush, Henry," his wife would caution him in a cracked and squeaky voice. "If you don't, I'll leave yuh. I'll git up and walk out of here some day, and then where would y' be? Y' ain't got anybody but me to look after yuh, so yuh just behave yourself. Your corn knife's on the mantel where it's alius been unless you've gone an' put it summers else."

Old Henry, who knew his wife would never leave him in any circumstances, used to speculate at times as to what he would do if she were to die. That was the one leaving that he really feared. As he climbed on the chair at night to wind the old, long-pendulumed, double-weighted clock, or went finally to the front and the back door to see that they were safely shut in, it was a comfort to know that Phoebe was there, properly ensconced on her side of the bed, and that if he stirred restlessly in the night, she would be there to ask what he wanted.

"Now, Henry, do He still! You're as restless as a chicken."

"Well, I can't sleep, Phoebe."

"Well, yuh needn't roll so, anyhow. Yuh kin let me sleep."

This usually reduced him to a state of somnolent ease. If she wanted a pail of water, it was a grumbling pleasure for him to get it; and if she did rise first to build the fires, he saw that the wood was cut and placed within easy reach. They divided this sim-

ple world nicely between them.

As the years had gone on, however, fewer and fewer people had called. They were well-known for a distance of as much as ten square miles as old Mr. and Mrs. Reifsneider, honest, moderately Christian, but too old to be really interesting any longer. The writing of letters had become an almost impossible burden too difficult to continue or even negotiate via others, although an occasional letter still did arrive from the daughter in Pemberton County. Now and then some old friend stopped with a pie or cake or a roasted chicken or duck, or merely to see that they were well ; but even these kindly minded visits were no longer frequent.

One day in the early spring of her sixty-fourth year Mrs. Reifsneider took sick, and from a low fever passed into some indefinable ailment which, because of her age, was no longer curable. Old Henry drove to Swinnerton, the neighboring town, and procured a doctor. Some friends called, and the immediate care of her was taken off his hands. Then one chill spring night she died, and old Henry, in a fog of sorrow and uncertainty, followed her body to the nearest graveyard, an unattractive space with a few pines growing in it. Although he might have gone to the daughter in Pemberton or sent for her, it was really too much trouble and he was too weary and fixed. It was suggested to him at once by one friend and another that he come to stay with them awhile, but he did not see fit. He was so old and so fixed in his notions and so accustomed to the exact surroundings he had known all his days, that he could not think of leaving. He wanted to remain near where they had put his Phoebe ; and the fact that he would have to live alone did not trouble him in the least. The living



children were notified and the care of him offered if he would leave, but he would not.

"I kin make a shift for myself," he continually announced to old Dr. Morrow, who had attended his wife in this case. "T kin cook a little, and, besides, it don't take much more'n coffee an' bread in the mornin's to satisfy me. I'll get along now well enough. Yuh just let me be." And after many pleadings and proffers of advice, with supplies of coffee and bacon and baked bread duly offered and accepted, he was left to himself. For a while he sat idly outside his door brooding in the spring sun. He tried to revive his interest in farming, and to keep himself busy and free from thought by looking after the fields, which of late had been much neglected. It was a gloomy thing to come in of an evening, however, or in the afternoon and find no shadow of Phoebe where everything suggested her. By degrees he put a few of her things away. At night he sat beside his lamp and read in the papers that were left him occasionally or in a Bible that he had neglected for years, but he could get little solace from these things. Mostly he held his hand over his mouth and looked at the floor as he sat and thought of what had become of her, and how soon he himself would die. He made a great business of making his coffee in the morning and frying himself a little bacon at night; but his appetite was gone. The shell in which he had been housed so long seemed vacant, and its shadows were suggestive of immedicable griefs. So he lived quite dolefully for five long months, and then a change began.

It was one night, after he had looked after the front and the back door, wound the clock, blown out the light, and gone through all the selfsame motions that he had indulged in for years, that he

went to bed not so much to sleep as to think. It was a moonlight night. The green-lichen-covered orchard just outside and to be seen from his bed where he now lay was a silvery affair, sweetly spectral. The moon shone through the east windows, throwing' the pattern of the panes on the wooden floor, and making the old furniture, to which he was accustomed, stand out dimly in the room. As usual he had been thinking of Phoebe and the years when they had been young together, and of the children who had gone, and the poor shift he was making of his present days. The house was coming to be in a very bad state indeed. The bed-clothes were in disorder and not clean, for he made a wretched shift of washing. It was a terror to him. The roof leaked, causing things, some of them, to remain damp for weeks at a time, but he was getting into that brooding state where he would accept anything rather than exert himself. He preferred to pace slowly to and fro or to sit and think.

By twelve o'clock of this particular night he was asleep, however, and by two had waked again. The moon by this time had shifted to a position on the western side of the house, and it now shone in through the windows of the living-room and those of the kitchen beyond. A certain combination of furniture — a chair near a table, with his coat on it, the half-open kitchen door casting a shadow, and the position of a lamp near a paper — gave him an exact representation of Phoebe leaning over the table as he had often seen her do in life. It gave him a great start. Could it be she — or her ghost? He had scarcely ever believed in spirits ; and still He looked at her fixedly in the feeble half-light, his old hair tingling oddly at the roots, and then sat up. The figure did not move. He put his thin legs out of the bed and sat looking at her, wondering if this could really be

Phoebe. They had talked of ghosts often in their lifetime, of apparitions and omens; but they had never agreed that such things could be. It had never been a part of his wife's creed that she could have a spirit that could return to walk the earth. Her after-world was quite a different affair, a vague heaven, no less, from which the righteous did not trouble to return. Yet here she was now, bending over the table in her black skirt and gray shawl, her pale profile outlined against the moonlight.

"Phoebe," he called, thrilling from head to toe and putting out one bony hand, "have yuh come back ?"

The figure did not stir, and he arose and walked uncertainly to the door, looking at it fixedly the while. As he drew near, however, the apparition resolved itself into its primal content — ^his old coat over the high-backed chair, the lamp by the paper, the half -open door.

"Well,\* he said to himself, his mouth open, "I thought shore I saw her." And he ran his hand strangely and vaguely through his hair, the while his nervous tension relaxed. Vanished as it had, it gave him the idea that she might return.

Another night, because of this first illusion, and because his mind was now constantly on her and he was old, he looked out of the window that was nearest his bed and commanded a hen-coop and pig-pen and a part of the wagon-shed, and there, a faint mist exuding from the damp of the ground, he thought he saw her again. It was one of those little wisps of mist, one of those faint exhalations of the earth that rise in a cool night after a warm day, and flicker like small white cypresses of fog before they disappear. In life it had

been a custom of hers to cross this lot from her kitchen door to the pig-pen to throw in any scrap that was left from her cooking, and here she was again. He sat up and watched it strangely, doubtfully, because of his previous experience, but inclined, because of the nervous titillation that passed over his body, to believe that spirits really were, and that Phoebe, who would be concerned because of his lonely state, must be thinking about him, and hence returning. What other way would she have? How otherwise could she express herself? It would be within the province of her charity so to do, and like her loving interest in him. He quivered and watched it eagerly ; but, a faint breath of air stirring, it wound away toward the fence and disappeared.

A third night, as he was actually dreaming, some ten days later, she came to his bedside and put her hand on his head.

"Poor Henry !" she said. "It's too bad."\*

He roused out of his sleep, actually to see her, he thought, moving from his bed-room into the one living-room, her figure a shadowy mass of black. The weak straining of his eyes caused little points of light to flicker about the outlines of her form. He arose, greatly astonished, walked the floor in the cool room, convinced that Phoebe was coming back to him. If he only thought sufficiently, if he made it perfectly clear by his feeling that he needed her greatly, she would come back, this kindly wife, and tell him what to do. She would perhaps be with him much of the time, in the night, anyhow; and that would make him less lonely, this state more endurable.

In age and wath the feeble it is not such a far cry from the subtleties of illusion to actual hallucination,

and in due time this transition was made for Henry. Night after night he waited, expecting her return. Once in his weird mood he thought he saw a pale light moving about the room, and another time he thought he saw her walking in the orchard after dark. It was one morning when the details of his lonely state were virtually unendurable that he woke with the thought that she was not dead. How he had arrived at this conclusion it is hard to say. His mind had gone. In its place was a fixed illusion. He and Phoebe had had a senseless quarrel. He had reproached her for not leaving his pipe where he was accustomed to find it, and she had left. It was an aberrated fulfillment of her old jesting threat that if he did not behave himself she would leave him.

'T guess I could find yuh ag'in," he had always said. But her cackling threat had always been :

"Yuh'll not find me if I ever leave yuh. I guess I kin git some place where yuh can't find me."

This morning when he arose he did not think to build the fire in the customary way or to grind his coffee and cut his bread, as was his wont, but solely to meditate as to where he should search for her and how he should induce her to come back. Recently the one horse had been dispensed with because he found it cumbersome and beyond his needs. He took down his soft crush hat after he had dressed himself, a new glint of interest and determination in his eye, and taking his black crook cane from behind the door, where he had always placed it, started cut briskly to look for her among the nearest neighbors. His old shoes clumped soundly in the dust as he walked, and his gray-black locks, now grown rather long, straggled out in a dramatic fringe or halo from under his hat.

His short coat stirred busily as he walked, and his hands and face were peaked and pale.

"Why, hello, Henry! Where're yuh goin\* this mornin'?" inquired Farmer Dodge, who, hauling a load of wheat to market, encountered him on the public road. He had not seen the aged farmer in months, not since his wife's death, and he wondered now, seeing him looking so spry.

"Yuh ain't seen Phoebe, have yuh?" inquired the old man, looking up quizzically.

"Phoebe who?" inquired Farmer Dodge, not for the moment connecting the name with Henry's dead wife.

"Why, my wife Phoebe, o' course. Who do yuh s'pose I mean?" He stared up with a pathetic sharpness of glance from under his shaggy, gray eyebrows.

"Wall, ril swan, Henry, y.uh ain't jokin', are yuh?" said the solid Dodge, a pursy man, with a smooth, hard, red face. '\*It can't be your wife yuh're talkin' about. She's dead."

"Dead! Shucks!" retorted the demented Reif-sneider. "She left me early this mornin', while I was sleepin'. She alius got up to build the fire, but she's gone now. We had a little spat last night, an' I guess that's the reason. But I guess I kin find her. She's gone over to Matilda Race's; that's where she's gone."

He started briskly up the road, leaving the amazed Dodge to stare in wonder after him.

"Well, I'll be switched!" he said aloud to himself. "He's clean out'n his head. That poor old feller's

been livin' down there till he's gone outen his mind. ril have to notify the authorities." And he flicked his whip with great enthusiasm. "Geddap!" he said, and was off.

Reifsneider met no one else in this poorly populated region until he reached the whitewashed fence of Matilda Race and her husband three miles away. He had passed several other houses en route, but these not being within the range of his illusion were not considered. His wife, who had known Matilda well, must be here. He opened the picket-gate which guarded the walk, and stamped briskly up to the door.

"Why, Mr. Reifsneider," exclaimed old Matilda herself, a stout woman, looking out of the door in answer to his knock, "what brings yuh here this mornin'?"

"Is Phoebe here?" he demanded eagerly.

'Phoebe who? What Phoebe?' replied Mrs. Race, curious as to this sudden development of energy on his part.

"Why, my Phoebe, o\* course. My wife Phoebe. Who do yuh s'pose? Ain't she here now?"

"Lawsy me!" exclaimed Mrs. Race, opening her mouth. "Yuh pore man! So you're clean out'n your mind now. Yuh come right in and sit down. FU git yuh a cup o' coffee. O' course your wife ain't here; but yuh come in an' sit down. PlI find her fer yuh after a while. I know where she is."

The old farmer's eyes softened, and he entered. He

was so thin and pale a specimen, pantalooned and patriarchal, that he aroused Mrs. Race's extremest sympathy as he took off his hat and laid it on his knees quite softly and mildly.

"We had a quarrel last night, an' she left me," he volunteered.

"Laws ! laws !" sighed Mrs. Race, there being no one present with whom to share her astonishment as she went to her kitchen. "The pore man ! Now somebody's just got to look after him. He can't be allowed to run around the country this way lookin' for his dead wife. It's turrible."

She boiled him a pot of coffee and brought in some of her new-baked bread and fresh butter. She set out some of her best jam and put a couple of eggs to boil, lying whole-heartedly the while.

"Now yuh stay right there, Uncle Henry, till Jake comes in, an' I'll send him to look for Phoebe. I think it's more'n likely she's over to Swinnerton with some o' her friends. Anyhow, we'll find out. Now yuh just drink this coffee an' eat this bread. Yuh must be tired. Yuh've had a long walk this mornin'."\* Her idea was to take counsel with Jake, "her man," and perhaps have him notify the authorities.

She bustled about, meditating on the uncertainties of life, while old Reifsneider thrummed on the rim of his hat with his pale fingers and later ate abstractedly of what she offered. His mind was on his wife, however, and since she was not here, or did not appear, it wandered vaguely away to a family by the name of Murray, miles away in another direction. He decided after a time that he would not wait for Jake Race to



hunt his wife but would seek her for himself. He must be on, and urge her to come back.

"Well, I'll be goin'," he said, getting up and looking strangely about him. "I guess she didn't come here after all. She went over to the Murrays', I guess, ril not wait any longer. Mis' Race. There's a lot to do over to the house to-day." And out he marched in the face of her protests taking to the dusty road again in the warm spring sun, his cane striking the earth as he went.

It was two hours later that this pale figure of a man appeared in the Murrays' doorway, dusty, perspiring, eager. He had tramped all of five miles, and it was noon. An amazed husband and wife of sixty heard his strange query, and realized also that he was mad. They begged him to stay to dinner, intending to notify the authorities later and see what could be done; but though he stayed to partake of a little something, he did not stay long, and was off again to another distant farmhouse, his idea of many things to do and his need of Phoebe impelling him. So it went for that day and the next and the next, the circle of his inquiry ever widening.

The process by which a character assumes the significance of being peculiar, his antics weird, yet harmless, in such a community is often involute and pathetic. This day, as has been said, saw Reifsneider at other doors, eagerly asking his unnatural question, and leaving a trail of amazement, sympathy, and pity in his wake. Although the authorities were informed — the county sheriff, no less — it was not deemed advisable to take him into custody; for when those who knew old Henry, and had for so long, reflected on the condition of the county insane asylum,

a place which, because of the poverty of the district, was of staggering aberration and sickening environment, it was decided to let him remain at large; for, strange to relate, it was found on investigation that at night he returned peaceably enough to his lonesome domicile there to discover whether his wife had returned, and to brood in loneliness until the morning. Who would lock up a thin, eager, seeking old man with iron-gray hair and an attitude of kindly, innocent inquiry, particularly when he was well known for a past of only kindly servitude and reliability? Those who had known him best rather agreed that he should be allowed to roam at large. He could do no harm. There were many who were willing to help him as to food, old clothes, the odds and ends of his daily life — at least at first. His figure after a time became not so much a common-place as an accepted curiosity, and the replies, "Why, no, Henry; I ain't see her," or "No, Henry; she ain't been here to-day," more customary.

For several years thereafter then he was an odd figure in the sun and rain, on dusty roads and muddy ones, encountered occasionally in strange and unexpected places, pursuing his endless search. Under-nourishment, after a time, although the neighbors and those who knew his history gladly contributed from their store, affected his body; for he walked much and ate little. The longer he roamed the public highway in this manner, the deeper became his strange hallucination ; and finding it harder and harder to return from his more and more distant pilgrimages, he finally began taking a few utensils with him from his home, making a small package of them, in order that he might not be compelled to return. In an old tin coffee-pot of large size he placed a small tin cup, a knife, fork, and spoon, some salt and pepper,

and to the outside of it, by a string forced through a pierced hole, he fastened a plate, which could be released, and which was his woodland table. It was no trouble for him to secure the little food that he needed, and with a strange, almost religious dignity, he had no hesitation in asking for that much. By degrees his hair became longer and longer, his once black hat became an earthen brown, and his clothes threadbare and dusty.

For all of three years he walked, and none knew how wide were his perambulations, nor how he survived the storms and cold. They could not see him, with homely rural understanding and forethought, sheltering himself in hay-cocks, or by the sides of cattle, whose warm bodies protected him from the cold, and whose dull understandings were not opposed to his harmless presence. Overhanging rocks and trees kept him at times from the rain, and a friendly hay-loft or corn-crib was not above his humble consideration.

The involute progression of hallucination is strange. From asking at doors and being constantly rebuffed or denied, he finally came to the conclusion that although his Phoebe might not be in any of the houses at the doors of which he inquired, ^he might nevertheless be within the sound of his voice. And so, from patient inquiry, he began to call sad, occasional cries, that ever and anon waked the quiet landscapes and ragged hill regions, and set to echoing his thin "O-o-o Ehoebe! O-o-o Phoebe!" It had a pathetic, albeit insane, ring, and many a farmer or plowboy came to know it even from afar and say, "There goes old Reifsneider."

Another thing that puzzled him greatly after a time and after many hundreds of inquiries was, when he no longer had any particular dooryard in view and

no special inquiry to make, which way to go. These cross-roads, which occasionally led in four or even six directions, came after a time to puzzle him. But to solve this knotty problem, which became more and more of a puzzle, there came to his aid another hallucination. Phoebe's spirit or some power of the air or wind or nature would tell him. If he stood at the center of the parting of the ways, closed his eyes, turned thrice about, and called \*'O-o-o Phoebe !'\* twice, and then threw his cane straight before him, that would surely indicate which way to go for Phoebe, or one of these mystic powers would surely govern its direction and fall! In whichever direction it went, even though, as was not infrequently the case, it took him back along the path he had already come, or across fields, he was not so far gone in his mind but that he gave himself ample time to search before he called again. Also the hallucination seemed to persist that at some time he would surely find her. There were hours when his feet were sore, and his limbs weary, when he would stop in the heat to wipe his seamed brow, or in the cold to beat his arms. Sometimes, after throwing away his cane, and finding it indicating the direction from which he had just come, he would shake his head wearily and philosophically, as if contemplating the unbelievable or an untoward fate, and then start briskly off. His strange figure came finally to be known in the farthest reaches of three or four counties. Old Reifsneider was a pathetic character. His fame was wide.

Near a little town called Watersville, in Green County, perhaps four miles from that minor center of human activity, there was a place or precipice locally known as the Red Cliff, a sheer wall of red sandstone, perhaps a hundred feet high, which raised its sharp face for half a mile or more above the fruitful corn-

fields and orchards that lay beneath, and which was surmounted by a thick grove of trees. The slope that slowly led up to it from the opposite side was covered by a rank growth of beech, hickory, and ash, through which threaded a number of wagon-tracks crossing at various angles. In fair weather it had become old Reifsneider's habit, so inured was he by now to the open, to make his bed in some such patch of trees as this to fry his bacon or boil his eggs at the foot of some tree before laying himself down for the night. Occasionally, so light and inconsequential was his sleep, he would walk at night. More often, the moonlight or some sudden wind stirring in the trees or a reconnoitering animal arousing him, he would sit up and think, or pursue his quest in the moonlight or the dark, a strange, unnatural, half wild, half savage-looking but utterly harmless creature, calling at lonely road crossings, staring at dark and shuttered houses, and wondering where, where Phoebe could really be.

That particular lull that comes in the systole-diastole of this earthly ball at two o'clock in the morning invariably aroused him, and though he might not go any farther he would sit up and contemplate the darkness or the stars, wondering. Sometimes in the strange processes of his mind he would fancy that he saw moving among the trees the figure of his lost wife, and then he would get up to follow, taking his utensils, always on a string, and his cane. If she seemed to evade him too easily he would run, or plead, or, suddenly losing track of the fancied figure, stand awed or disappointed, grieving for the moment over the almost insurmountable difficulties of his search.

It was in the seventh year of these hopeless peregrinations, in the dawn of a similar springtime to that

in which his wife had died, that he came at last one night to the vicinity of this self-same patch that crowned the rise to the Red Cliff. His far-flung cane, used as a divining-rod at the last cross-roads, had brought him hither. He had walked many, many miles. It was after ten o'clock at night, and he was very weary. Long wandering and little eating had left him but a shadow of his former self. It was a question now not so much of physical strength but of spiritual endurance which kept him up. He had scarcely eaten this day, and now exhausted he set himself down in the dark to rest and possibly to sleep. Curiously on this occasion a strange suggestion of the presence of his wife surrounded him. It would not be long now, he counseled with himself, although the long months had brought him nothing, until he should see her, talk to her. He fell asleep after a time, his head on his knees. At midnight the moon began to rise, and at two in the morning, his wakeful hour, was a large silver disk shining through the trees to the east. He opened his eyes when the radiance became strong, making a silver pattern at his feet and lighting the woods with strange lusters and silvery, shadowy forms. As usual, his old notion that his wife must be near occurred to him on this occasion, and he looked about him with a speculative, anticipatory eye. What was it that moved in the distant shadows along the path by which he had entered — a pale, flickering will-o'-the-wisp that bobbed gracefully among the trees and riveted his expectant gaze? Moonlight and shadows combined to give it a strange form and a stranger reality, this fluttering of bog-fire or dancing of wandering fire-flies. Was it truly his lost Phoebe? By a circuitous route it passed about him, and in his fevered state he fancied that he could see the very eyes of her, not as she was when he last saw her in the black dress and shawl but now a

strange' younger Phoebe, gayer, sweeter, the one whom he had known years before as a girl. Old Reifsneider got up. He had been expecting and dreaming of this hour all these years, and now as he saw the feeble light dancing lightly before him he peered at it questioningly, one thin hand in his gray hair.

Of a sudden there came to him now for the first time in many years the full charm of her girlish figure as he had known it in boyhood, the pleasing, sympathetic smile, the brown hair, the blue sash she had once worn about her waist at a picnic, her gay, graceful movements. He walked around the base of the tree, straining with his eyes, forgetting for once his cane and utensils, and following eagerly after. On she moved before him, a will-o'-the-wisp of the spring, a little flame above her head, and it seemed as though among the small saplings of ash and beech and the thick trunks of hickory and elm that she signaled with a young, a lightsome hand.

"O Phoebe ! Phoebe !" he called. "Have yuh really come ? Have yuh really answered me ?"\* And hurrying faster, he fell once, scrambling lamely to his feet, only to see the light in the distance dancing illusively on. On and on he hurried until he was fairly running, brushing his ragged arms against the trees, striking his hands and face against impeding twigs. His hat was gone, his lungs were breathless, his reason quite astray, when coming to the edge of the cliff he saw her below among a silvery bed of apple-trees now blooming in the spring.

"O Phoebe !" he called. "O Phoebe ! Oh, no, don't leave me!" And feeling the lure of a world where love was young and Phoebe as this vision presented

her, a delightful epitome of their quondam youth, he gave a gay cry of "Oh, wait, Phoebe!" and leaped.

Some farmer-boys, reconnoitering this region of bounty and prospect some few days afterward, found first the tin utensils tied together under the tree where he had left them, and then later at the foot of the cliff, pale, broken, but elate, a molded smile of peace and delight upon his lips, his body. His old hat was discovered lying under some low-growing saplings the twigs of which had held it back. No one of all the simple population knew how eagerly and joyously he had found his lost mate.

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## **A DROP OF DEW**

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Kott?*, by Lafcadio Hearn

*Tsuyu no inochi.*

--\_Buddhist proverb.\_

To the bamboo lattice of my study-window a single dewdrop hangs quivering.

Its tiny sphere repeats the colours of the morning,--colours of sky and field and far-off trees. Inverted images of these can be discerned in it,--also the microscopic picture of a cottage, upside down, with children at play before the door.

Much more than the visible world is imaged by that dewdrop: the world invisible, of infinite mystery, is likewise therein repeated. And without as within the drop there is motion unceasing,--motion forever incomprehensible of atoms and forces,--faint shiverings also, making prismatic reply to touches of air and sun.

\*



Buddhism finds in such a dewdrop the symbol of that other microcosm which has been called the Soul.... What more, indeed, is man than just such a temporary orbing of viewless ultimates,--imaging sky and land and life,--filled with perpetual mysterious shudderings,--and responding in some wise to every stir of the ghostly forces that environ him?...

\*

Soon that tiny globe of light, with all its fairy tints and topsy-turvy picturings, will have vanished away. Even so, within another little while, you and I must likewise dissolve and disappear.

Between the vanishing of the drop and the vanishing of the man, what difference? A difference of words.... But ask yourself what becomes of the dewdrop?

By the great sun its atoms are separated and lifted and scattered. To cloud and earth, to river and sea they go; and out of land and stream and sea again they will be updrawn, only to fall and to scatter anew. They will creep in opalescent mists;--they will whiten in frost and hail and snow;--they will reflect again the forms and the colours of the macrocosm; they will throb to the ruby pulsing of hearts that are yet unborn. For each one of them must combine again with countless kindred atoms for the making of other drops,--drops of dew and rain and sap, of blood and sweat and tears....

How many times? Billions of ages before our sun began to burn, those atoms probably moved in other drops, reflecting the sky-tints and the earth-colours of worlds in some past universe. And after this present universe shall have vanished out of Space, those very same atoms--by virtue of the forces incomprehensible that made them--will probably continue to sphere in dews that will shadow the morning beauty of planets yet to be.

\*

Even so with the particles of that composite which you term your very Self. Before the hosts of heaven the atoms of you were--and thrilled,--and quickened,--and reflected appearances of things. And when all the stars of the visible Night shall have burnt themselves out, those atoms will doubtless again take part in the orbiting of Mind,--will tremble again in thoughts, emotions, memories,--in all the joys and pains of lives still to be lived in worlds still to be evolved....

\*

Your personality?--your peculiarity? That is to say, your ideas, sentiments, recollections?--your very particular hopes and fears and loves and hates? Why, in each of a trillion of dewdrops there must be differences infinitesimal of atom-thrilling and of reflection. And in every one of the countless pearls of ghostly vapour updrawn from the Sea of Birth and Death there are like infinitesimal peculiarities. Your personality signifies, in the eternal order, just as much as the especial motion of molecules in the shivering of any single drop. Perhaps in no other drop will the thrilling and the picturing be ever exactly the same; but the dews will continue to gather and to fall, and there will always be quivering pictures ... The very delusion of delusions is the idea of death as loss.

There is no loss--because there is not any Self that can be lost. Whatsoever was, that you have been;--whatsoever is, that you are;--whatsoever will be, that you must become. Personality!--individuality!--the ghosts of a dream in a dream! Life infinite only there is; and all that appears to be is but the thrilling of it,--sun, moon, and stars,--earth, sky, and sea,--and Mind and Man, and Space and Time. All of them are shadows. The shadows come and go;--the Shadow-Maker shapes forever.

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## JANE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Love Stories*, by Mary Roberts Rinehart

I

Having retired to a hospital to sulk, Jane remained there. The family came and sat by her bed uncomfortably and smoked, and finally retreated with defeat written large all over it, leaving Jane to the continued possession of Room 33, a pink kimono with slippers to match, a hand-embroidered face pillow with a rose-coloured bow on the corner, and a young nurse with a gift of giving Jane daily the appearance of a strawberry and vanilla ice rising from a meringue of bed linen.

Jane's complaint was temper. The family knew this, and so did Jane, although she had an annoying way of looking hurt, a gentle heart-brokenness of speech that made the family, under the pretence of getting a match, go out into the hall and swear softly under its breath. But it was temper, and the family was not deceived. Also, knowing Jane, the family was quite ready to believe that while it was swearing in the hall, Jane was biting holes in the hand-embroidered face pillow in Room 33.

It had finally come to be a test of endurance. Jane vowed to stay at the hospital until the family on bended knee begged her to emerge and to brighten the world again with her presence. The family, being her father, said it would be damned if it would, and that if Jane cared to live on anæmic chicken broth, oatmeal wafers and massage twice a day for the rest of her life, why, let her.

The dispute, having begun about whether Jane should or should not marry a certain person, Jane representing the affirmative and her father the negative, had taken on new aspects, had grown and altered, and had, to be brief, become a contest between the masculine Johnson and the feminine Johnson as to which would take the count. Not that this appeared on the surface. The masculine Johnson, having closed the summer home on Jane's defection and gone

back to the city, sent daily telegrams, novels and hothouse grapes, all three of which Jane devoured indiscriminately. Once, indeed, Father Johnson had motored the forty miles from town, to be told that Jane was too ill and unhappy to see him, and to have a glimpse, as he drove furiously away, of Jane sitting pensive at her window in the pink kimono, gazing over his head at the distant hills and clearly entirely indifferent to him and his wrath.

So we find Jane, on a frosty morning in late October, in triumphant possession of the field--aunts and cousins routed, her father sulking in town, and the victor herself--or is victor feminine?--and if it isn't, shouldn't it be?--sitting up in bed staring blankly at her watch.

Jane had just wakened--an hour later than usual; she had rung the bell three times and no one had responded. Jane's famous temper began to stretch and yawn. At this hour Jane was accustomed to be washed with tepid water, scented daintily with violet, alcohol-rubbed, talcum-powdered, and finally fresh-linened, coifed and manicured, to be supported with a heap of fresh pillows and fed creamed sweet-bread and golden-brown coffee and toast.

Jane rang again, with a line between her eyebrows. The bell was not broken. She could hear it distinctly. This was an outrage! She would report it to the superintendent. She had been ringing for ten minutes. That little minx of a nurse was flirting somewhere with one of the internes.

Jane angrily flung the covers back and got out on her small bare feet. Then she stretched her slim young arms above her head, her spoiled red mouth forming a scarlet O as she yawned. In her sleeveless and neckless nightgown, with her hair over her shoulders, minus the more elaborate coiffure which later in the day helped her to poise and firmness, she looked a pretty young girl, almost--although Jane herself never suspected this--almost an amiable young person.

Jane saw herself in the glass and assumed immediately the two lines between her eyebrows which were the outward and visible token of what she had suffered. Then she found her slippers, a pair of stockings to match and two round bits of pink silk elastic of private and feminine use, and sat down on the floor to put them on.

The floor was cold. To Jane's wrath was added indignation. She hitched herself along the boards to the radiator and put her hand on it. It was even colder than Jane.

The family temper was fully awake by this time and ready for business. Jane, sitting on the icy floor, jerked on her stockings, snapped the pink bands into place, thrust her feet into her slippers and rose, shivering. She went to the bed, and by dint of careful manoeuvring so placed the bell between the head of the bed and the wall that during the remainder of her toilet it rang steadily.

The remainder of Jane's toilet was rather casual. She flung on the silk kimono, twisted her hair on top of her head and stuck a pin or two in it, thus achieving a sort of effect a thousand times more bewildering than she had ever managed with a curling iron and twenty seven hair pins, and flinging her door wide stalked into the hall. At least she meant to stalk, but one does not really stamp about much in number-two, heelless, pink-satin mules.

At the first stalk--or stamp--she stopped. Standing uncertainly just outside her door was a strange man, strangely attired. Jane clutched her kimono about her and stared.

"Did--did you--are you ringing?" asked the apparition. It wore a pair of white-duck trousers, much soiled, a coat that bore the words "furnace room" down the front in red letters on a white tape, and a clean and spotless white apron. There was coal dust on its face and streaks of it in its hair, which appeared normally to be red.

"There's something the matter with your bell," said the young man. "It keeps on ringing."

"I intend it to," said Jane coldly.

"You can't make a racket like that round here, you know," he asserted, looking past her into the room.

"I intend to make all the racket I can until I get some attention."

"What have you done--put a book on it?"

"Look here"--Jane added another line to the two between her eyebrows. In the family this was generally a signal for a retreat, but of course the young man could not know this, and, besides, he was red-headed. "Look here," said Jane, "I don't know who you are and I don't care either, but that bell is going to ring until I get my bath and some breakfast. And it's going to ring then unless I stop it."

The young man in the coal dust and the white apron looked at Jane and smiled. Then he walked past her into the room, jerked the bed from the wall and released the bell.

"Now!" he said as the din outside ceased. "I'm too busy to talk just at present, but if you do that again I'll take the bell out of the room altogether. There are other people in the hospital besides yourself."

At that he started out and along the hall, leaving Jane speechless. After he'd gone about a dozen feet he stopped and turned, looking at Jane reflectively.

"Do you know anything about cooking?" he asked.

"I know more about cooking than you do about politeness," she retorted, white with fury, and went into her room and slammed the door. She went directly to the bell and put it behind the bed and set it to ringing again. Then she sat down in a chair and picked up

a book. Had the red-haired person opened the door she was perfectly prepared to fling the book at him. She would have thrown a hatchet had she had one.

As a matter of fact, however, he did not come back. The bell rang with a soul-satisfying jangle for about two minutes and then died away, and no amount of poking with a hairpin did any good. It was clear that the bell had been cut off outside!

For fifty-five minutes Jane sat in that chair breakfastless, very casually washed and with the aforesaid Billie Burkeness of hair. Then, hunger gaining over temper, she opened the door and peered out. From somewhere near at hand there came a pungent odor of burning toast. Jane sniffed; then, driven by hunger, she made a short sally down the hall to the parlour where the nurses on duty made their headquarters. It was empty. The dismantled bell register was on the wall, with the bell unscrewed and lying on the mantel beside it, and the odour of burning toast was stronger than ever.

Jane padded softly to the odour, following her small nose. It led her to the pantry, where under ordinary circumstances the patients' trays were prepared by a pantrymaid, the food being shipped there from the kitchen on a lift. Clearly the circumstances were not ordinary. The pantrymaid was not in sight.

Instead, the red-haired person was standing by the window scraping busily at a blackened piece of toast. There was a rank odour of boiling tea in the air.

"Damnation!" said the red-haired person, and flung the toast into a corner where there already lay a small heap of charred breakfast hopes. Then he saw Jane.

"I fixed the bell, didn't I?" he remarked. "I say, since you claim to know so much about cooking, I wish you'd make some toast."

"I didn't say I knew much," snapped Jane, holding her kimono round

her. "I said I knew more than you knew about politeness."

The red-haired person smiled again, and then, making a deep bow, with a knife in one hand and a toaster in the other, he said: "Madam, I prithee forgive me for my untoward conduct of an hour since. Say but the word and I replace the bell."

"I won't make any toast," said Jane, looking at the bread with famished eyes.

"Oh, very well," said the red-haired person with a sigh. "On your head be it!"

"But I'll tell you how to do it," conceded Jane, "if you'll explain who you are and what you are doing in that costume and where the nurses are."

The red-haired person sat down on the edge of the table and looked at her.

"I'll make a bargain with you," he said. "There's a convalescent typhoid in a room near yours who swears he'll go down to the village for something to eat in his--er--hospital attire unless he's fed soon. He's dangerous, empty. He's reached the cannibalistic stage. If he should see you in that ravishing pink thing, I--I wouldn't answer for the consequences. I'll tell you everything if you'll make him six large slices of toast and boil him four or five eggs, enough to hold him for a while. The tea's probably ready; it's been boiling for an hour."

Hunger was making Jane human. She gathered up the tail of her kimono, and stepping daintily into the pantry proceeded to spread herself a slice of bread and butter.

"Where is everybody?" she asked, licking some butter off her thumb with a small pink tongue.



\_Oh, I am the cook and the captain bold,  
And the mate of the Nancy brig,  
And the bosun tight and the midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain's gig.\_

recited the red-haired person.

"You!" said Jane with the bread halfway to her mouth.

"Even I," said the red-haired person. "I'm the superintendent, the staff, the training school, the cooks, the furnace man and the ambulance driver."

Jane was pouring herself a cup of tea, and she put in milk and sugar and took a sip or two before she would give him the satisfaction of asking him what he meant. Anyhow, probably she had already guessed. Jane was no fool.

"I hope you're getting the salary list," she said, sitting on the pantry girl's chair and, what with the tea inside and somebody to quarrel with, feeling more like herself. "My father's one of the directors, and somebody gets it."

The red-haired person sat on the radiator and eyed Jane. He looked slightly stunned, as if the presence of beauty in a Billie Burke chignon and little else except a kimono was almost too much for him. From somewhere near by came a terrific thumping, as of some one pounding a hairbrush on a table. The red-haired person shifted along the radiator a little nearer Jane, and continued to gloat.

"Don't let that noise bother you," he said; "that's only the convalescent typhoid banging for his breakfast. He's been shouting for food ever since I came at six last night."

"Is it safe to feed him so much?"

"I don't know. He hasn't had anything yet. Perhaps if you're ready

you'd better fix him something."

Jane had finished her bread and tea by this time and remembered her kimono.

"I'll go back and dress," she said primly. But he wouldn't hear of it.

"He's starving," he objected as a fresh volley of thumps came along the hall. "I've been trying at intervals since daylight to make him a piece of toast. The minute I put it on the fire I think of something I've forgotten, and when I come back it's in flames."

So Jane cut some bread and put on eggs to boil, and the red-haired person told his story.

"You see," he explained, "although I appear to be a furnace man from the waist up and an interne from the waist down, I am really the new superintendent."

"I hope you'll do better than the last one," she said severely. "He was always flirting with the nurses."

"I shall never flirt with the nurses," he promised, looking at her. "Anyhow I shan't have any immediate chance. The other fellow left last night and took with him everything portable except the ambulance--nurses, staff, cooks. I wish to Heaven he'd taken the patients! And he did more than that. He cut the telephone wires!"

"Well!" said Jane. "Are you going to stand for it?"

The red-haired man threw up his hands. "The village is with him," he declared. "It's a factional fight--the village against the fashionable summer colony on the hill. I cannot telephone from the village--the telegraph operator is deaf when I speak to him; the village milkman and grocer sent boys up this morning--look here." He fished a scrap of paper from his pocket and read:

I will not supply the Valley Hospital with any fresh meats, canned oysters and sausages, or do any plumbing for the hospital until the reinstatement of Dr. Sheets.

T. CASHDOLLAR, Butcher.

Jane took the paper and read it again. "Humph!" she commented. "Old Sheets wrote it himself. Mr. Cashdollar couldn't think 'reinstatement,' let alone spell it."

"The question is not who wrote it, but what we are to do," said the red-haired person. "Shall I let old Sheets come back?"

"If you do," said Jane fiercely, "I shall hate you the rest of my life."

And as it was clear by this time that the red-haired person could imagine nothing more horrible, it was settled then and there that he should stay.

"There are only two wards," he said. "In the men's a man named Higgins is able to be up and is keeping things straight. And in the woman's ward Mary O'Shaughnessy is looking after them. The furnaces are the worst. I'd have forgiven almost anything else. I've sat up all night nursing the fires, but they breathed their last at six this morning and I guess there's nothing left but to call the coroner."

Jane had achieved a tolerable plate of toast by that time and four eggs. Also she had a fine flush, a combination of heat from the gas stove and temper.

"They ought to be ashamed," she cried angrily, "leaving a lot of sick people!"

"Oh, as to that," said the red-headed person, "there aren't any very sick ones. Two or three neurasthenics like yourself and a

convalescent typhoid and a D.T. in a private room. If it wasn't that Mary O'Shaughnessy----"

But at the word "neurasthenics" Jane had put down the toaster, and by the time the unconscious young man had reached the O'Shaughnessy she was going out the door with her chin up. He called after her, and finding she did not turn he followed her, shouting apologies at her back until she went into her room. And as hospital doors don't lock from the inside she pushed the washstand against the knob and went to bed to keep warm.

He stood outside and apologised again, and later he brought a tray of bread and butter and a pot of the tea, which had been boiling for two hours by that time, and put it outside the door on the floor. But Jane refused to get it, and finished her breakfast from a jar of candied ginger that some one had sent her, and read "Lorna Doone."

Now and then a sound of terrific hammering would follow the steampipes and Jane would smile wickedly. By noon she had finished the ginger and was wondering what the person about whom she and the family had disagreed would think when he heard the way she was being treated. And by one o'clock she had cried her eyes entirely shut and had pushed the washstand back from the door.

## II

Now a hospital full of nurses and doctors with a bell to summon food and attention is one thing. A hospital without nurses and doctors, and with only one person to do everything, and that person mostly in the cellar, is quite another. Jane was very sad and lonely, and to add to her troubles the delirium-tremens case down the hall began to sing "Oh Promise Me" in a falsetto voice and kept it up for hours.

At three Jane got up and bathed her eyes. She also did her hair, and thus fortified she started out to find the red-haired person. She intended to say that she was paying sixty-five dollars a week

and belonged to a leading family, and that she didn't mean to endure for a moment the treatment she was getting, and being called a neurasthenic and made to cook for the other patients.

She went slowly along the hall. The convalescent typhoid heard her and called.

"Hey, doc!" he cried. "Hey, doc! Great Scott, man, when do I get some dinner?"

Jane quickened her steps and made for the pantry. From somewhere beyond, the delirium-tremens case was singing happily:

\_I--love you o--own--ly,  
I love--but--you.\_

Jane shivered a little. The person in whom she had been interested and who had caused her precipitate retirement, if not to a nunnery, to what answered the same purpose, had been very fond of that song. He used to sing it, leaning over the piano and looking into her eyes.

Jane's nose led her again to the pantry. There was a sort of soupy odour in the air, and sure enough the red-haired person was there, very immaculate in fresh ducks, pouring boiling water into three tea-cups out of a kettle and then dropping a beef capsule into each cup.

Now Jane had intended, as I have said, to say that she was being outrageously treated, and belonged to one of the best families, and so on. What she really said was piteously:

"How good it smells!"

"Doesn't it!" said the red-haired person, sniffing. "Beef capsules. I've made thirty cups of it so far since one o'clock--the more they have the more they want. I say, be a good girl and run up to the

kitchen for some more crackers while I carry food to the convalescent typhoid. He's murderous!"

"Where are the crackers?" asked Jane stiffly, but not exactly caring to raise an issue until she was sure of getting something to eat.

"Store closet in the kitchen, third drawer on the left," said the red-haired man, shaking some cayenne pepper into one of the cups. "You might stop that howling lunatic on your way if you will."

"How?" asked Jane, pausing.

"Ram a towel down his throat, or--but don't bother. I'll dose him with this beef tea and red pepper, and he'll be too busy putting out the fire to want to sing."

"You wouldn't be so cruel!" said Jane, rather drawing back. The red-haired person smiled and to Jane it showed that he was actually ferocious. She ran all the way up for the crackers and down again, carrying the tin box. There is no doubt that Jane's family would have promptly swooned had it seen her.

When she came down there was a sort of after-dinner peace reigning. The convalescent typhoid, having filled up on milk and beef soup, had floated off to sleep. "The Chocolate Soldier" had given way to deep-muttered imprecations from the singer's room. Jane made herself a cup of bouillon and drank it scalding. She was making the second when the red-haired person came back with an empty cup.

"I forgot to explain," he said, "that beef tea and red pepper's the treatment for our young friend in there. After a man has been burning his stomach daily with a quart or so of raw booze----"

"I beg your pardon," said Jane coolly. Booze was not considered good form on the hill--the word, of course. There was plenty of the substance.

"Raw booze," repeated the red-haired person. "Nothing short of red pepper or dynamite is going to act as a substitute. Why, I'll bet the inside of that chap's stomach is of the general sensitiveness and consistency of my shoe."

"Indeed!" said Jane, coldly polite. In Jane's circle people did not discuss the interiors of other people's stomachs. The red-haired person sat on the table with a cup of bouillon in one hand and a cracker in the other.

"You know," he said genially, "it's awfully bully of you to come out and keep me company like this. I never put in such a day. I've given up fussing with the furnace and got out extra blankets instead. And I think by night our troubles will be over." He held up the cup and glanced at Jane, who was looking entrancingly pretty. "To our troubles being over!" he said, draining the cup, and then found that he had used the red pepper again by mistake. It took five minutes and four cups of cold water to enable him to explain what he meant.

"By our troubles being over," he said finally when he could speak, "I mean this: There's a train from town at eight to-night, and if all goes well it will deposit in the village half a dozen nurses, a cook or two, a furnace man--good Heavens, I wonder if I forgot a furnace man!"

It seemed, as Jane discovered, that the telephone wires being cut, he had sent Higgins from the men's ward to the village to send some telegrams for him.

"I couldn't leave, you see," he explained, "and having some small reason to believe that I am *\_persona non grata\_* in this vicinity I sent Higgins."

Jane had always hated the name Higgins. She said afterward that she felt uneasy from that moment. The red-haired person, who was not bad-looking, being tall and straight and having a very decent nose,

looked at Jane, and Jane, having been shut away for weeks--Jane preened a little and was glad she had done her hair.

"You looked better the other way," said the red-haired person, reading her mind in a most uncanny manner. "Why should a girl with as pretty hair as yours cover it up with a net, anyhow?"

"You are very disagreeable and--and impertinent," said Jane, sliding off the table.

"It isn't disagreeable to tell a girl she has pretty hair," the red-haired person protested--"or impertinent either."

Jane was gathering up the remnants of her temper, scattered by the events of the day.

"You said I was a neurasthenic," she accused him. "It--it isn't being a neurasthenic to be nervous and upset and hating the very sight of people, is it?"

"Bless my soul!" said the red-haired man. "Then what is it?" Jane flushed, but he went on tactlessly: "I give you my word, I think you are the most perfectly"--he gave every appearance of being about to say "beautiful," but he evidently changed his mind--"the most perfectly healthy person I have ever looked at," he finished.

It is difficult to say just what Jane would have done under other circumstances, but just as she was getting her temper really in hand and preparing to launch something, shuffling footsteps were heard in the hall and Higgins stood in the doorway.

He was in a sad state. One of his eyes was entirely closed, and the corresponding ear stood out large and bulbous from his head. Also he was coated with mud, and he was carefully nursing one hand with the other.

He said he had been met at the near end of the railroad bridge by



the ex-furnace man and one of the ex-orderlies and sent back firmly, having in fact been kicked back part of the way. He'd been told to report at the hospital that the tradespeople had instituted a boycott, and that either the former superintendent went back or the entire place could starve to death.

It was then that Jane discovered that her much-vaunted temper was not one-two-three to that of the red-haired person. He turned a sort of blue-white, shoved Jane out of his way as if she had been a chair, and she heard him clatter down the stairs and slam out of the front door.

Jane went back to her room and looked down the drive. He was running toward the bridge, and the sunlight on his red hair and his flying legs made him look like a revengeful meteor. Jane was weak in the knees. She knelt on the cold radiator and watched him out of sight, and then got trembly all over and fell to snivelling. This was of course because, if anything happened to him, she would be left entirely alone. And anyhow the D.T. case was singing again and had rather got on her nerves.

In ten minutes the red-haired person appeared. He had a wretched-looking creature by the back of the neck and he alternately pushed and kicked him up the drive. He--the red-haired person--was whistling and clearly immensely pleased with himself.

Jane put a little powder on her nose and waited for him to come and tell her all about it. But he did not come near. This was quite the cleverest thing he could have done, had he known it. Jane was not accustomed to waiting in vain. He must have gone directly to the cellar, half pushing and half kicking the luckless furnace man, for about four o'clock the radiator began to get warm.

At five he came and knocked at Jane's door, and on being invited in he sat down on the bed and looked at her.

"Well, we've got the furnace going," he said.

"Then that was the----"

"Furnace man? Yes."

"Aren't you afraid to leave him?" queried Jane. "Won't he run off?"

"Got him locked in a padded cell," he said. "I can take him out to coal up. The rest of the time he can sit and think of his sins. The question is--what are we to do next?"

"I should think," ventured Jane, "that we'd better be thinking about supper."

"The beef capsules are gone."

"But surely there must be something else about--potatoes or things like that?"

He brightened perceptibly. "Oh, yes, carloads of potatoes, and there's canned stuff. Higgins can pare potatoes, and there's Mary O'Shaughnessy. We could have potatoes and canned tomatoes and eggs."

"Fine!" said Jane with her eyes gleaming, although the day before she would have said they were her three abominations.

And with that he called Higgins and Mary O'Shaughnessy and the four of them went to the kitchen.

Jane positively shone. She had never realised before how much she knew about cooking. They built a fire and got kettles boiling and everybody pared potatoes, and although in excess of zeal the eggs were ready long before everything else and the tomatoes scorched slightly, still they made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in ability, and when Higgins had carried the trays to the lift and started them on their way, Jane and the red-haired person shook hands on it and then ate a boiled potato from the same plate,

sitting side by side on a table.

They were ravenous. They boiled one egg each and ate it, and then boiled another and another, and when they finished they found that Jane had eaten four potatoes, four eggs and unlimited bread and butter, while the red-haired person had eaten six saucers of stewed tomatoes and was starting on the seventh.

"You know," he said over the seventh, "we've got to figure this thing out. The entire town is solid against us--no use trying to get to a telephone. And anyhow they've got us surrounded. We're in a state of siege."

Jane was beating up an egg in milk for the D.T. patient, the capsules being exhausted, and the red-haired person was watching her closely. She had the two vertical lines between her eyes, but they looked really like lines of endeavour and not temper.

She stopped beating and looked up.

"Couldn't I go to the village?" she asked.

"They would stop you."

"Then--I think I know what we can do," she said, giving the eggnog a final whisk. "My people have a summer place on the hill. If you could get there you could telephone to the city."

"Could I get in?"

"I have a key."

Jane did not explain that the said key had been left by her father, with the terse hope that if she came to her senses she could get into the house and get her clothes.

"Good girl," said the red-headed person and patted her on the

shoulder. "We'll euchre the old skate yet." Curiously, Jane did not resent either the speech or the pat.

He took the glass and tied on a white apron. "If our friend doesn't drink this, I will," he continued. "If he'd seen it in the making, as I have, he'd be crazy about it."

He opened the door and stood listening. From below floated up the refrain:

\_I--love you o--own--ly,  
I love--but--you.\_

"Listen to that!" he said. "Stomach's gone, but still has a heart!"

Higgins came up the stairs heavily and stopped close by the red-haired person, whispering something to him. There was a second's pause. Then the red-haired person gave the eggnog to Higgins and both disappeared.

Jane was puzzled. She rather thought the furnace man had got out and listened for a scuffle, but none came. She did, however, hear the singing cease below, and then commence with renewed vigour, and she heard Higgins slowly remounting the stairs. He came in, with the empty glass and a sheepish expression. Part of the eggnog was distributed over his person.

"He wants his nurse, ma'am," said Higgins. "Wouldn't let me near him. Flung a pillow at me."

"Where is the doctor?" demanded Jane.

"Busy," replied Higgins. "One of the women is sick."

Jane was provoked. She had put some labour into the eggnog. But it shows the curious evolution going on in her that she got out the eggs and milk and made another one without protest. Then with her

head up she carried it to the door.

"You might clear things away, Higgins," she said, and went down the stairs. Her heart was going rather fast. Most of the men Jane knew drank more or less, but this was different. She would have turned back halfway there had it not been for Higgins and for owning herself conquered. That was Jane's real weakness--she never owned herself beaten.

The singing had subsided to a low muttering. Jane stopped outside the door and took a fresh grip on her courage. Then she pushed the door open and went in.

The light was shaded, and at first the tossing figure on the bed was only a misty outline of greys and whites. She walked over, expecting a pillow at any moment and shielding the glass from attack with her hand.

"I have brought you another eggnog," she began severely, "and if you spill it----"

Then she looked down and saw the face on the pillow.

To her everlasting credit, Jane did not faint. But in that moment, while she stood staring down at the flushed young face with its tumbled dark hair and deep-cut lines of dissipation, the man who had sung to her over the piano, looking love into her eyes, died to her, and Jane, cold and steady, sat down on the side of the bed and fed the eggnog, spoonful by spoonful, to his corpse!

When the blank-eyed young man on the bed had swallowed it all passively, looking at her with dull, incurious eyes, she went back to her room and closing the door put the washstand against it. She did nothing theatrical. She went over to the window and stood looking out where the trees along the drive were fading in the dusk from green to grey, from grey to black. And over the transom came again and again monotonously the refrain:

\_I--love you o--own--ly,  
I love--but--you.\_

Jane fell on her knees beside the bed and buried her wilful head in the hand-embroidered pillow, and said a little prayer because she had found out in time.

### III

The full realisation of their predicament came with the dusk. The electric lights were shut off! Jane, crawling into bed tearfully at half after eight, turned the reading light switch over her head, but no flood of rosy radiance poured down on the hand-embroidered pillow with the pink bow.

Jane sat up and stared round her. Already the outline of her dresser was faint and shadowy. In half an hour black night would settle down and she had not even a candle or a box of matches. She crawled out, panicky, and began in the darkness to don her kimono and slippers. As she opened the door and stepped into the hall the convalescent typhoid heard her and set up his usual cry.

"Hey," he called, "whoever that is come in and fix the lights. They're broken. And I want some bread and milk. I can't sleep on an empty stomach!"

Jane padded on past the room where love lay cold and dead, down the corridor with its alarming echoes. The house seemed very quiet. At a corner unexpectedly she collided with some one going hastily. The result was a crash and a deluge of hot water. Jane got a drop on her bare ankle, and as soon as she could breathe she screamed.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" demanded the red-haired person angrily. "I've been an hour boiling that water, and now it has to be done over again!"

"It would do a lot of good to look!" retorted Jane. "But if you wish I'll carry a bell!"

"The thing for you to do," said the red-haired person severely, "is to go back to bed like a good girl and stay there until morning. The light is cut off."

"Really!" said Jane. "I thought it had just gone out for a walk. I daresay I may have a box of matches at least?"

He fumbled in his pockets without success.

"Not a match, of course!" he said disgustedly. "Was any one ever in such an infernal mess? Can't you get back to your room without matches?"

"I shan't go back at all unless I have some sort of light," maintained Jane. "I'm--horribly frightened!"

The break in her voice caught his attention and he put his hand out gently and took her arm.

"Now listen," he said. "You've been brave and fine all day, and don't stop it now. I--I've got all I can manage. Mary O'Shaughnessy is----" He stopped. "I'm going to be very busy," he said with half a groan. "I surely do wish you were forty for the next few hours. But you'll go back and stay in your room, won't you?"

He patted her arm, which Jane particularly hated generally. But Jane had altered considerably since morning.

"Then you cannot go to the telephone?"

"Not to-night."

"And Higgins?"

"Higgins has gone," he said. "He slipped off an hour ago. We'll have to manage to-night somehow. Now will you be a good child?"

"I'll go back," she promised meekly. "I'm sorry I'm not forty."

He turned her round and started her in the right direction with a little push. But she had gone only a step or two when she heard him coming after her quickly.

"Where are you?"

"Here," quavered Jane, not quite sure of him or of herself perhaps.

But when he stopped beside her he didn't try to touch her arm again. He only said:

"I wouldn't have you forty for anything in the world. I want you to be just as you are, very beautiful and young."

Then, as if he was afraid he would say too much, he turned on his heel, and a moment after he kicked against the fallen pitcher in the darkness and awoke a thousand echoes. As for Jane, she put her fingers to her ears and ran to her room, where she slammed the door and crawled into bed with burning cheeks.

Jane was never sure whether it was five minutes later or five seconds when somebody in the room spoke--from a chair by the window.

"Do you think," said a mild voice--"do you think you could find me some bread and butter? Or a glass of milk?"

Jane sat up in bed suddenly. She knew at once that she had made a mistake, but she was quite dignified about it. She looked over at the chair, and the convalescent typhoid was sitting in it, wrapped in a blanket and looking wan and ghostly in the dusk.



"I'm afraid I'm in the wrong room," Jane said very stiffly, trying to get out of the bed with dignity, which is difficult. "The hall is dark and all the doors look so alike----"

She made for the door at that and got out into the hall with her heart going a thousand a minute again.

"You've forgotten your slippers," called the convalescent typhoid after her. But nothing would have taken Jane back.

The convalescent typhoid took the slippers home later and locked them away in an inner drawer, where he kept one or two things like faded roses, and old gloves, and a silk necktie that a girl had made him at college--things that are all the secrets a man keeps from his wife and that belong in that small corner of his heart which also he keeps from his wife. But that has nothing to do with Jane.

Jane went back to her own bed thoroughly demoralised. And sleep being pretty well banished by that time, she sat up in bed and thought things over. Before this she had not thought much, only raged and sulked alternately. But now she thought. She thought about the man in the room down the hall with the lines of dissipation on his face. And she thought a great deal about what a silly she had been, and that it was not too late yet, she being not forty and "beautiful." It must be confessed that she thought a great deal about that. Also she reflected that what she deserved was to marry some person with even a worse temper than hers, who would bully her at times and generally keep her straight. And from that, of course, it was only a step to the fact that red-haired people are proverbially bad-tempered!

She thought, too, about Mary O'Shaughnessy without another woman near, and not even a light, except perhaps a candle. Things were always so much worse in the darkness. And perhaps she might be going to be very ill and ought to have another doctor!

Jane seemed to have been reflecting for a long time, when the church

clock far down in the village struck nine. And with the chiming of the clock was born, full grown, an idea which before it was sixty seconds of age was a determination.

In pursuance of the idea Jane once more crawled out of bed and began to dress; she put on heavy shoes and a short skirt, a coat, and a motor veil over her hair. The indignation at the defection of the hospital staff, held in subjection during the day by the necessity for doing something, now rose and lent speed and fury to her movements. In an incredibly short time Jane was feeling her way along the hall and down the staircase, now a well of unfathomable blackness and incredible rustlings and creakings.

The front doors were unlocked. Outside there was faint starlight, the chirp of a sleepy bird, and far off across the valley the gasping and wheezing of a freight climbing the heavy grade to the village.

Jane paused at the drive and took a breath. Then at her best gymnasium pace, arms close to sides, head up, feet well planted, she started to run. At the sundial she left the drive and took to the lawn gleaming with the frost of late October. She stopped running then and began to pick her way more cautiously. Even at that she collided heavily with a wire fence marking the boundary, and sat on the ground for some time after, whimpering over the outrage and feeling her nose. It was distinctly scratched and swollen. No one would think her beautiful with a nose like that!

She had not expected the wire fence. It was impossible to climb and more difficult to get under. However, she found one place where the ground dipped, and wormed her way under the fence in most undignified fashion. It is perfectly certain that had Jane's family seen her then and been told that she was doing this remarkable thing for a woman she had never seen before that day, named Mary O'Shaughnessy, and also for a certain red-haired person of whom it had never heard, it would have considered Jane quite irrational. But it is entirely probable that Jane became really rational that night

for the first time in her spoiled young life.

Jane never told the details of that excursion. Those that came out in the paper were only guess-work, of course, but it is quite true that a reporter found scraps of her motor veil on three wire fences, and there seems to be no reason to doubt, also, that two false curls were discovered a week later in a cow pasture on her own estate. But as Jane never wore curls afterward anyhow----

Well, Jane got to her own house about eleven and crept in like a thief to the telephone. There were more rustlings and creakings and rumblings in the empty house than she had ever imagined, and she went backward through the hall for fear of something coming after her. But, which is to the point, she got to the telephone and called up her father in the city.

The first message that astonished gentleman got was that a red-haired person at the hospital was very ill, having run into a wire fence and bruised a nose, and that he was to bring out at once from town two doctors, six nurses, a cook and a furnace man!

After a time, however, as Jane grew calmer, he got it straightened out, and said a number of things over the telephone anent the deserting staff that are quite forbidden by the rules both of the club and of the telephone company. He gave Jane full instructions about sending to the village and having somebody come up and stay with her, and about taking a hot footbath and going to bed between blankets, and when Jane replied meekly to everything "Yes, father," and "All right, father," he was so stunned by her mildness that he was certain she must be really ill.

Not that Jane had any idea of doing all these things. She hung up the telephone and gathered all the candles from all the candlesticks on the lower floor, and started back for the hospital. The moon had come up and she had no more trouble with fencing, but she was desperately tired. She climbed the drive slowly, coming to frequent pauses. The hospital, long and low and sleeping, lay before her,

and in one upper window there was a small yellow light.

Jane climbed the steps and sat down on the top one. She felt very tired and sad and dejected, and she sat down on the upper step to think of how useless she was, and how much a man must know to be a doctor, and that perhaps she would take up nursing in earnest and amount to something, and----

It was about three o'clock in the morning when the red-haired person, coming down belatedly to close the front doors, saw a shapeless heap on the porch surrounded by a radius of white-wax candles, and going up shoved at it with his foot. Whereat the heap moved slightly and muttered "Lemme shleep."

The red-haired person said "Good Heavens!" and bending down held a lighted match to the sleeper's face and stared, petrified. Jane opened her eyes, sat up and put her hand over her mutilated nose with one gesture.

"You!" said the red-haired person. And then mercifully the match went out.

"Don't light another," said Jane. "I'm an alarming sight. Would--would you mind feeling if my nose is broken?"

He didn't move to examine it. He just kept on kneeling and staring.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"Over to telephone," said Jane, and yawned. "They're bringing everybody in automobiles--doctors, nurses, furnace man--oh, dear me, I hope I mentioned a cook!"

"Do you mean to say," said the red-haired person wonderingly, "that you went by yourself across the fields and telephoned to get me out of this mess?"

"Not at all," Jane corrected him coolly. "I'm in the mess myself."

"You'll be ill again."

"I never was ill," said Jane. "I was here for a mean disposition."

Jane sat in the moonlight with her hands in her lap and looked at him calmly. The red-haired person reached over and took both her hands.

"You're a heroine," he said, and bending down he kissed first one and then the other. "Isn't it bad enough that you are beautiful without your also being brave?"

Jane eyed him, but he was in deadly earnest. In the moonlight his hair was really not red at all, and he looked pale and very, very tired. Something inside of Jane gave a curious thrill that was half pain. Perhaps it was the dying of her temper, perhaps----

"Am I still beautiful with this nose?" she asked.

"You are everything that a woman should be," he said, and dropping her hands he got up. He stood there in the moonlight, straight and young and crowned with despair, and Jane looked up from under her long lashes.

"Then why don't you stay where you were?" she asked.

At that he reached down and took her hands again and pulled her to her feet. He was very strong.

"Because if I do I'll never leave you again," he said. "And I must go."

He dropped her hands, or tried to, but Jane wasn't ready to be dropped.

"You know," she said, "I've told you I'm a sulky, bad-tempered----"

But at that he laughed suddenly, triumphantly, and put both his arms round her and held her close.

"I love you," he said, "and if you are bad-tempered, so am I, only I think I'm worse. It's a shame to spoil two houses with us, isn't it?"

To her eternal shame be it told, Jane never struggled. She simply held up her mouth to be kissed.

That is really all the story. Jane's father came with three automobiles that morning at dawn, bringing with him all that goes to make up a hospital, from a pharmacy clerk to absorbent cotton, and having left the new supplies in the office he stamped upstairs to Jane's room and flung open the door.

He expected to find Jane in hysterics and the pink silk kimono.

What he really saw was this: A coal fire was lighted in Jane's grate, and in a low chair before it, with her nose swollen level with her forehead, sat Jane, holding on her lap Mary O'Shaughnessy's baby, very new and magenta-coloured and yelling like a trooper. Kneeling beside the chair was a tall, red-headed person holding a bottle of olive oil.

"Now, sweetest," the red-haired person was saying, "turn him on his tummy and we'll rub his back. Gee, isn't that a fat back!"

And as Jane's father stared and Jane anxiously turned the baby, the red-haired person leaned over and kissed the back of Jane's neck.

"Jane!" he whispered.

"Jane!!" said her father.

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## THE CAT

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Lords of the Housetops*, by Various

The snow was falling, and the Cat's fur was stiffly pointed with it, but he was imperturbable. He sat crouched, ready for the death-spring, as he had sat for hours. It was night--but that made no difference--all times were as one to the Cat when he was in wait for prey. Then, too, he was under no constraint of human will, for he was living alone that winter. Nowhere in the world was any voice calling him; on no hearth was there a waiting dish. He was quite free except for his own desires, which tyrannized over him when unsatisfied as now. The Cat was very hungry--almost famished, in fact. For days the weather had been very bitter, and all the feebler wild things which were his prey by inheritance, the born serfs to his family, had kept, for the most part, in their burrows and nests, and the Cat's long hunt had availed him nothing. But he waited with the inconceivable patience and persistency of his race; besides, he was certain. The Cat was a creature of absolute convictions, and his faith in his deductions never wavered. The rabbit had gone in there between those low-hung pine boughs. Now her little doorway had before it a shaggy curtain of snow, but in there she was. The Cat had seen her enter, so like a swift grey shadow that even his sharp and practised eyes had glanced back for the substance following, and then she was gone. So he sat down and waited, and he waited still in the white night, listening angrily to the north wind starting in the upper heights of the mountains with distant screams, then swelling into an awful crescendo of rage, and swooping down with furious white wings of snow like a flock of fierce eagles into the valleys and ravines. The Cat was on the side of a mountain, on a wooded terrace. Above him a few feet away towered the rock ascent as steep as the wall of a cathedral. The Cat had never climbed it--trees were the ladders to his heights of life. He had often looked with wonder at the rock, and miauled bitterly and resentfully as man does in the face of a forbidding Providence. At his left was the sheer precipice. Behind him, with a short stretch of woody growth between, was the frozen perpendicular wall of a mountain stream. Before him was the way to his home. When the rabbit came out she

was trapped; her little cloven feet could not scale such unbroken steeps. So the Cat waited. The place in which he was looked like a maelstrom of the wood. The tangle of trees and bushes clinging to the mountain-side with a stern clutch of roots, the prostrate trunks and branches, the vines embracing everything with strong knots and coils of growth, had a curious effect, as of things which had whirled for ages in a current of raging water, only it was not water, but wind, which had disposed everything in circling lines of yielding to its fiercest points of onset. And now over all this whirl of wood and rock and dead trunks and branches and vines descended the snow. It blew down like smoke over the rock-crest above; it stood in a gyrating column like some death-wraith of nature, on the level, then it broke over the edge of the precipice, and the Cat cowered before the fierce backward set of it. It was as if ice needles pricked his skin through his beautiful thick fur, but he never faltered and never once cried. He had nothing to gain from crying, and everything to lose; the rabbit would hear him cry and know he was waiting.

It grew darker and darker, with a strange white smother, instead of the natural blackness of night. It was a night of storm and death superadded to the night of nature. The mountains were all hidden, wrapped about, overawed, and tumultuously overborne by it, but in the midst of it waited, quite unconquered, this little, unswerving, living patience and power under a little coat of grey fur.

A fiercer blast swept over the rock, spun on one mighty foot of whirlwind athwart the level, then was over the precipice.

Then the Cat saw two eyes luminous with terror, frantic with the impulse of flight, he saw a little, quivering, dilating nose, he saw two pointing ears, and he kept still, with every one of his fine nerves and muscles strained like wires. Then the rabbit was out--there was one long line of incarnate flight and terror--and the Cat had her.

Then the Cat went home, trailing his prey through the snow.

The Cat lived in the house which his master had built, as rudely as a



child's block-house, but stanchly enough. The snow was heavy on the low slant of its roof, but it would not settle under it. The two windows and the door were made fast, but the Cat knew a way in. Up a pine-tree behind the house he scuttled, though it was hard work with his heavy rabbit, and was in his little window under the eaves, then down through the trap to the room below, and on his master's bed with a spring and a great cry of triumph, rabbit and all. But his master was not there; he had been gone since early fall and it was now February. He would not return until spring, for he was an old man, and the cruel cold of the mountains clutched at his vitals like a panther, and he had gone to the village to winter. The Cat had known for a long time that his master was gone, but his reasoning was always sequential and circuitous; always for him what had been would be, and the more easily for his marvellous waiting powers so he always came home expecting to find his master.

When he saw that he was still gone, he dragged the rabbit off the rude couch which was the bed to the floor, put one little paw on the carcass to keep it steady, and began gnawing with head to one side to bring his strongest teeth to bear.

It was darker in the house than it had been in the wood, and the cold was as deadly, though not so fierce. If the Cat had not received his fur coat unquestioningly of Providence, he would have been thankful that he had it. It was a mottled grey, white on the face and breast, and thick as fur could grow.

The wind drove the snow on the windows with such force that it rattled like sleet, and the house trembled a little. Then all at once the Cat heard a noise, and stopped gnawing his rabbit and listened, his shining green eyes fixed upon a window. Then he heard a hoarse shout, a halloo of despair and entreaty; but he knew it was not his master come home, and he waited, one paw still on the rabbit. Then the halloo came again, and then the Cat answered. He said all that was essential quite plainly to his own comprehension. There was in his cry of response inquiry, information, warning, terror, and finally, the offer of comradeship; but the man outside did not hear him, because of the howling of the storm.

Then there was a great battering pound at the door, then another, and another. The Cat dragged his rabbit under the bed. The blows came thicker and faster. It was a weak arm which gave them, but it was nerved by desperation. Finally the lock yielded, and the stranger came in. Then the Cat, peering from under the bed, blinked with a sudden light, and his green eyes narrowed. The stranger struck a match and looked about. The Cat saw a face wild and blue with hunger and cold, and a man who looked poorer and older than his poor old master, who was an outcast among men for his poverty and lowly mystery of antecedents; and he heard a muttered, unintelligible voicing of distress from the harsh piteous mouth. There was in it both profanity and prayer, but the Cat knew nothing of that.

The stranger braced the door which he had forced, got some wood from the stock in the corner, and kindled a fire in the old stove as quickly as his half-frozen hands would allow. He shook so pitiably as he worked that the Cat under the bed felt the tremor of it. Then the man, who was small and feeble and marked with the scars of suffering which he had pulled down upon his own head, sat down in one of the old chairs and crouched over the fire as if it were the one love and desire of his soul, holding out his yellow hands like yellow claws, and he groaned. The Cat came out from under the bed and leaped up on his lap with the rabbit. The man gave a great shout and start of terror, and sprang, and the Cat slid clawing to the floor, and the rabbit fell inertly, and the man leaned, gasping with fright, and ghastly, against the wall. The Cat grabbed the rabbit by the slack of its neck and dragged it to the man's feet. Then he raised his shrill, insistent cry, he arched his back high, his tail was a splendid waving plume. He rubbed against the man's feet, which were bursting out of their torn shoes.

The man pushed the Cat away, gently enough, and began searching about the little cabin. He even climbed painfully the ladder to the loft, lit a match, and peered up in the darkness with straining eyes. He feared lest there might be a man, since there was a cat. His experience with men had not been pleasant, and neither had the experience of men been pleasant with him. He was an old wandering Ishmael among his kind; he had stumbled upon the house of a brother, and the brother was not at

home, and he was glad.

He returned to the Cat, and stooped stiffly and stroked his back, which the animal arched like the spring of a bow.

Then he took up the rabbit and looked at it eagerly by the firelight. His jaws worked. He could almost have devoured it raw. He fumbled--the Cat close at his heels--around some rude shelves and a table, and found, with a grunt of self-gratulation, a lamp with oil in it. That he lighted; then he found a frying-pan and a knife, and skinned the rabbit, and prepared it for cooking, the Cat always at his feet.

When the odour of the cooking flesh filled the cabin, both the man and the Cat looked wolfish. The man turned the rabbit with one hand and stooped to pat the Cat with the other. The Cat thought him a fine man. He loved him with all his heart, though he had known him such a short time, and though the man had a face both pitiful and sharply set at variance with the best of things.

It was a face with the grimy grizzle of age upon it, with fever hollows in the cheeks, and the memories of wrong in the dim eyes, but the Cat accepted the man unquestioningly and loved him. When the rabbit was half cooked, neither the man nor the Cat could wait any longer. The man took it from the fire, divided it exactly in halves, gave the Cat one, and took the other himself. Then they ate.

Then the man blew out the light, called the Cat to him, got on the bed, drew up the ragged coverings, and fell asleep with the Cat in his bosom.

The man was the Cat's guest all the rest of the winter, and winter is long in the mountains. The rightful owner of the little hut did not return until May. All that time the Cat toiled hard, and he grew rather thin himself, for he shared everything except mice with his guest; and sometimes game was wary, and the fruit of patience of days was very little for two. The man was ill and weak, however, and unable to eat much, which was fortunate, since he could not hunt for himself. All day long he lay on the bed, or else sat crouched over the fire. It was a

good thing that fire-wood was ready at hand for the picking up, not a stone's-throw from the door, for that he had to attend to himself.

The Cat foraged tirelessly. Sometimes he was gone for days together, and at first the man used to be terrified, thinking he would never return; then he would hear the familiar cry at the door, and stumble to his feet and let him in. Then the two would dine together, sharing equally; then the Cat would rest and purr, and finally sleep in the man's arms.

Towards spring the game grew plentiful; more wild little quarry were tempted out of their homes, in search of love as well as food. One day the Cat had luck--a rabbit, a partridge, and a mouse. He could not carry them all at once, but finally he had them together at the house door. Then he cried, but no one answered. All the mountain streams were loosened, and the air was full of the gurgle of many waters, occasionally pierced by a bird-whistle. The trees rustled with a new sound to the spring wind; there was a flush of rose and gold-green on the breasting surface of a distant mountain seen through an opening in the wood. The tips of the bushes were swollen and glistening red, and now and then there was a flower; but the Cat had nothing to do with flowers. He stood beside his booty at the house door, and cried and cried with his insistent triumph and complaint and pleading, but no one came to let him in. Then the cat left his little treasures at the door, and went around to the back of the house to the pine-tree, and was up the trunk with a wild scramble, and in through his little window, and down through the trap to the room, and the man was gone.

The Cat cried again--that cry of the animal for human companionship which is one of the sad notes of the world; he looked in all the corners; he sprang to the chair at the window and looked out; but no one came. The man was gone and he never came again.

The Cat ate his mouse out on the turf beside the house; the rabbit and the partridge he carried painfully into the house, but the man did not come to share them. Finally, in the course of a day or two, he ate them up himself; then he slept a long time on the bed, and when he waked the man was not there.

Then the Cat went forth to his hunting-grounds again, and came home at night with a plump bird, reasoning with his tireless persistency in expectancy that the man would be there; and there was a light in the window, and when he cried his old master opened the door and let him in.

His master had strong comradeship with the Cat, but not affection. He never patted him like that gentler outcast, but he had a pride in him and an anxiety for his welfare, though he had left him alone all winter without scruple. He feared lest some misfortune might have come to the Cat, though he was so large of his kind, and a mighty hunter. Therefore, when he saw him at the door in all the glory of his glossy winter coat, his white breast and face shining like snow in the sun, his own face lit up with welcome, and the Cat embraced his feet with his sinuous body vibrant with rejoicing purrs.

The Cat had his bird to himself, for his master had his own supper already cooking on the stove. After supper the Cat's master took his pipe, and sought a small store of tobacco which he had left in his hut over winter. He had thought often of it; that and the Cat seemed something to come home to in the spring. But the tobacco was gone; not a dust left. The man swore a little in a grim monotone, which made the profanity lose its customary effect. He had been, and was, a hard drinker; he had knocked about the world until the marks of its sharp corners were on his very soul, which was thereby calloused, until his very sensibility to loss was dulled. He was a very old man.

He searched for the tobacco with a sort of dull combativeness of persistency; then he stared with stupid wonder around the room. Suddenly many features struck him as being changed. Another stove-lid was broken; an old piece of carpet was tacked up over a window to keep out the cold; his fire-wood was gone. He looked and there was no oil left in his can. He looked at the coverings on his bed; he took them up, and again he made that strange remonstrant noise in his throat. Then he looked again for his tobacco.

Finally he gave it up. He sat down beside the fire, for May in the

mountains is cold; he held his empty pipe in his mouth, his rough forehead knitted, and he and the Cat looked at each other across that impassable barrier of silence which has been set between man and beast from the creation of the world.

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## THE SEALED ROOM

By Bernhard Severin Ingemann

Project Gutenberg Etext *Most Interesting Stories of All Nations*

Edited by Julian Hawthorne

For many years there stood in a side street in Kiel an unpretentious old frame house which had a forbidding, almost sinister appearance, with its old-fashioned balcony and its overhanging upper stories. For the last twenty years the house had been occupied by a greatly respected widow, Madame Wolff, to whom the dwelling had come by inheritance. She lived there quietly with her one daughter, in somewhat straitened circumstances.

What gave the house a mysterious notoriety, augmenting the sinister quality in its appearance, was the fact that one of its rooms, a corner room on the main floor, had not been opened for generations. The door was firmly fastened and sealed with plaster, as well as the window looking out upon the street. Above the door was an old inscription, dated 1603, which threatened sudden death and eternal damnation to any human being who dared to open the door or efface the inscription. Neither door nor window had been opened in the two hundred years that had passed since the inscription was put up. But for a generation back or more, the partition wall and the sealed door had been covered with wall paper, and the inscription had been almost forgotten.

The room adjoining the sealed chamber was a large hall, utilized only for rare important events. Such an occasion arose with the wedding of the only daughter of the house. For that evening the great hall, as it was called, was brilliantly decorated and

illuminated for a ball. The building had deep cellars and the old floors were elastic. Madame Wolff had in vain endeavored to avoid using the great hall at all, for the foolish old legend of the sealed chamber aroused a certain superstitious dread in her heart, and she rarely if ever entered the hall herself. But merry Miss Elizabeth, her pretty young daughter, was passionately fond of dancing, and her mother had promised that she should have a ball on her wedding day. Her betrothed, Secretary Winther, was also a good dancer, and the two young people combated the mother's prejudice against the hall and laughed at her fear of the sealed room. They thought it would be wiser to appear to ignore the stupid legend altogether, and thus to force the world to forget it. In spite of secret misgivings Madame Wolff yielded to their arguments. And for the first time in many years the merry strains of dance music were heard in the great hall that lay next the mysterious sealed chamber.

The bridal couple, as well as the wedding guests, were in the gayest mood, and the ball was an undoubted success. The dancing was interrupted for an hour while supper was served in an adjoining room. After the repast the guests returned to the hall, and it was several hours more before the last dance was called. The season was early autumn and the weather still balmy. The windows had been opened to freshen the air. But the walls retained their dampness and suddenly the dancers noticed that the old wall paper which covered the partition wall between the hall and the sealed chamber had been loosened through the jarring of the building, and had fallen away from the sealed door with its mysterious inscription.

The story of the sealed chamber had been almost forgotten by most of those present, forgotten with many other old legends heard in childhood. The inscription thus suddenly revealed naturally aroused great interest, and there was a general curiosity to know what the mysterious closed room might hide. Conjectures flew from mouth to mouth. Some insisted that the closed door must hide the traces of a hideous murder, or some other equally terrible crime. Others suggested that perhaps the room had been used as a hiding

place for garments and other articles belonging to some person who had died of a pestilence, and that the room had been sealed for fear of spreading the disease. Still others thought that in the sealed chamber there might be found a secret entrance from the cellars, which had made the room available as a hiding place for robbers or smugglers. The guests had quite forgotten their dancing in the interest awakened by the sight of the mysterious door.

"For mercy's sake, don't let's go too near it!" exclaimed some of the young ladies. But the majority thought it would be great fun to see what was hidden there. Most of the men said that they considered it foolish not to have opened the door long ago, and examined the room. The young bridegroom did not join in this opinion, however. He upheld the decision of his mother-in-law not to allow any attempt to effect an entrance into the room. He knew that there was a clause in the title deeds to the house which made the express stipulation that no owner should ever permit the corner room to be opened. There was discussion among the guests as to whether such a clause in a title deed could be binding for several hundred years, and many doubted its validity at any time. But most of them understood why Madame Wolff did not wish any investigation, even should any of those present have sufficient courage to dare the curse and break open the door.

"Nonsense! What great courage is necessary for that?" exclaimed Lieutenant Flemming Wolff, a cousin of the bride of the evening. This gentleman had a reputation that was not of the best. He was known to live mostly on debt and pawn tickets, and was of a most quarrelsome disposition. As a duelist he was feared because of his specialty. This was the ability, and the inclination, through a trick in the use of the foils, to disfigure his opponent's face badly, without at all endangering his life. In this manner he had already sadly mutilated several brave officers and students, who had had the bad luck to stand up against him. He himself was anything but pleasant to look upon, his natural plainness having been rendered repellent by a life of low debauchery. He cherished a secret grudge against the bridegroom and bitter feelings toward



the bride, because the latter had so plainly shown her aversion for him when he had ventured to pay suit to her.

The family had not desired any open break with this disagreeable relative, and had therefore sent him an invitation to the wedding. They had taken it for granted that, under the circumstances, he would prefer to stay away. But he had appeared at the ball, and, perhaps to conceal his resentment, he had been the most indefatigable dancer of the evening. At supper he had partaken freely of the strongest wines, and was plainly showing the effect of them by this time. His eyes rolled wildly, and those who knew him took care not to contradict him, or to have anything to say to him at all.

With a boastful laugh he repeated his assertion that it didn't take much courage to open a sealed door, especially when there might be a fortune concealed behind it. In his opinion it was cowardly to let oneself be frightened by a century-old legend. HE wouldn't let that bother him if HE had influence enough in the family to win the daughter and induce the mother to give a ball in the haunted hall. With this last hit he hoped to arouse the young husband's ire. But the latter merely shrugged his shoulders and turned away with a smile of contempt.

Lieutenant Wolff fired up at this, and demanded to know whether the other intended to call his, the lieutenant's, courage into question by his behavior.

"Not in the slightest, when it is a matter of obtaining a loan, or of mutilating an adversary with a trick at fencing," answered the bridegroom angrily, taking care, however, that neither the bride nor any of the other ladies should hear his words. Then he continued in a whisper: "But I don't believe you'd have the courage to remain here alone and in darkness, before this closed door, for a single hour. If you wish to challenge me for this doubt, I am at your disposal as soon as you have proven me in the wrong. But I choose the weapons."

"They must be chosen by lot, sir cousin," replied the lieutenant, his cheek pale and his jaws set. "I will expect you to breakfast to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

The bridegroom nodded, and took the other's cold dry hand for an instant. The men who had overheard the short conversation looked upon it as a meaningless incident, the memory of which would disappear from the lieutenant's brain with the vanishing wine fumes.

The ball was now over. The bride left the hall with her husband and several of the guests who were to accompany the young couple to their new home. The lights went out in the old house. The door of the dancing hall had been locked from the outside. Lieutenant Flemming Wolff remained alone in the room, having hidden himself in a dark corner where he had not been seen by the servants, who had extinguished the lights and locked the door. The night watchman had just called out two o'clock when the solitary guest found himself, still giddy from the heavy wine, alone in the great dark hall in front of the mysterious door.

The windows were at only a slight elevation from the street, and a spring would take him to safety should his desire to remain there, or to solve the mystery of the sealed room, vanish. But next morning all the windows in the great hall were found closed, just as the servants had left them the night before. The night watchman reported that he had heard a hollow-sounding crash in that unoccupied part of the house during the night. But that was nothing unusual, as there was a general belief in the neighborhood that the house was haunted.

For hollow noises were often heard there, and sounds as of money falling on the floor, and rattling and clinking as of a factory machine. Enlightened people, it is true, explained these sounds as echoes of the stamping and other natural noises from a large stable just behind the old house. But in spite of these explanations and

their eminent feasibility, the dread of the unoccupied portion of the house was so great that not even the most reckless man servant could be persuaded to enter it alone after nightfall.

Next morning at eight o'clock Winther appeared at his mother-in-law's door, saying that he had forgotten something of importance in the great hall the night before. Madame Wolff had not yet arisen, but the maid who let in the early visitor noticed with surprise that he had a large pistol sticking out of one of his pockets.

Winther had been to his cousin's apartment and found it locked. He now entered the great hall, and at first glance thought it empty. To his alarm and astonishment, however, he saw that the sealed door had been broken open. He approached it with anxiety, and found his wife's cousin, the doughty duelist, lying pale and lifeless on the threshold. Beside him lay a large stone which had struck his head in falling and must have killed him at once. Over the door was a hole in the wall, just the size of the stone. The latter had evidently rested on the upper edge of the door, and must certainly have fallen on its opening. The unfortunate man lay half in the mysterious chamber and half in the hall, just as he must have fallen when the stone struck him.

The formal investigation of the closed room was made in the presence of the police authorities. It contained nothing but a small safe which was built into the wall. When the safe had been opened by force, an inner chamber, which had to be broken open by itself, was found to contain a number of rolls of gold pieces, many jewels and numerous notes and I. O. U.'s. The treasure was covered by an old document. From this latter it was learned that the owner of the house two hundred years ago had been a silk weaver by the name of Flemming Ambrosius Wolff. He was said to have lent money on security for many years, but had died apparently a poor man, because he had so carefully hidden his riches that little of it was found after his death.

With a niggardliness that bordered on madness, he had believed that

he could hide his treasure forever by shutting it up in the sealed room. The curse over the door was to frighten away any venturesome mortal, and further security was given by the clause in the title deed.

The universally disliked Lieutenant Flemming Wolff must have had many characteristics in common with this disagreeable old ancestor, to whose treasure he would have fallen heir had he not lost his life in the discovering of it. The old miser had not hidden his wealth for all eternity, as he had hoped, but had only brought about the inheriting of it by Madame Wolff, the owner of the house, and the next of kin. The first use to which this lady put the money was to tear down the uncanny old building and to erect in its stead a beautiful new home for her daughter and son-in-law.

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## **FREDDIE**

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Men I'm Not Married To*, by Dorothy Parker

"Oh, boy!" people say of Freddie. "You just ought to meet him some time! He's a riot, that's what he is--more fun than a goat."

Other, and more imaginative souls play whimsically with the idea, and say that he is more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Still others go at the thing from a different angle, and refer to him as being as funny as a crutch. But I always feel, myself, that they stole the line from Freddie. Satire--that is his dish.

And there you have, really, one of Freddie's greatest crosses. People steal his stuff right and left. He will say something one day, and the next it will be as good as all over the city. Time after time I have gone to him and told him that I have heard lots of vaudeville acts using his comedy, but he just puts on the most killing expression, and says, "Oh, say not suchly!" in that way of his. And, of course, it gets me laughing so that I can't say another word about it.

That is the way he always is, just laughing it off when he is told that people are using his best lines without even so much as word of acknowledgment. I never hear any one say "There is such a thing as being too good-natured" but that I think of Freddie.

You never knew any one like him on a party. Things will be dragging along, the way they do at the beginning of the evening, with the early arrivals sitting around asking one another have they been to anything good at the theatre lately, and is it any wonder there is so much sickness around with the weather so changeable. The party will be just about plucking at the coverlet when in will breeze Freddie, and from that moment on the evening is little short of a whirlwind. Often and often I have heard him called the life of the party, and I have always felt that there is not the least bit of exaggeration in the expression.

What I envy about Freddie is that poise of his. He can come right into a room full of strangers, and be just as much at home as if he had gone through grammar school with them. He smashes the ice all to nothing the moment he is introduced to the other guests by pretending to misunderstand their names, and calling them something entirely different, keeping a perfectly straight face all the time as if he never realized there was anything wrong. A great many people say he puts them in mind of Buster Keaton that way.

He is never at a loss for a screaming crack. If the hostess asks him to have a chair Freddie comes right back at her with "No, thanks; we have chairs at home." If the host offers him a cigar he will say just like a flash, "What's the matter with it?" If one of the men borrows a cigarette and a light from him Freddie will say in that dry voice of his, "Do you want the coupons too?" Of course his wit is pretty fairly caustic, but no one ever seems to take offense at it. I suppose there is everything in the way he says things.

And he is practically a whole vaudeville show in himself. He is never without a new story of what Pat said to Mike as they were walking down the street, or how Abie tried to cheat Ikie, or what old Aunt Jemima

answered when she was asked why she had married for the fifth time. Freddie does them in dialect, and I have often thought it is a wonder that we don't all split our sides. And never a selection that every member of the family couldn't listen to, either--just healthy fun.

Then he has a repertory of song numbers, too. He gives them without accompaniment, and every song has a virtually unlimited number of verses, after each one of which Freddie goes conscientiously through the chorus. There is one awfully clever one, a big favourite of his, with the chorus rendered a different way each time--showing how they sang it when grandma was a girl, how they sing it in gay Paree and how a cabaret performer would do it. Then there are several along the general lines of Casey Jones, two or three about negroes who specialized on the banjo, and a few in which the lyric of the chorus consists of the syllables "ha, ha, ha." The idea is that the audience will get laughing along with the singer.

If there is a piano in the house Freddie can tear things even wider open. There may be many more accomplished musicians, but nobody can touch him as far as being ready to oblige goes. There is never any of this hanging back waiting to be coaxed or protesting that he hasn't touched a key in months. He just sits right down and does all his specialties for you. He is particularly good at doing "Dixie" with one hand and "Home, Sweet Home" with the other, and Josef Hofmann himself can't tie Freddie when it comes to giving an imitation of a fife-and-drum corps approaching, passing, and fading away in the distance.

But it is when the refreshments are served that Freddie reaches the top of his form. He always insists on helping to pass plates and glasses, and when he gets a big armful of them he pretends to stumble. It is as good as a play to see the hostess' face. Then he tucks his napkin into his collar, and sits there just as solemnly as if he thought that were the thing to do; or perhaps he will vary that one by folding the napkin into a little square and putting it carefully in his pocket, as if he thought it was a handkerchief. You just ought to see him making believe that he has swallowed an olive pit. And the remarks he makes about the

food--I do wish I could remember how they go. He is funniest, though, it seems to me, when he is pretending that the lemonade is intoxicating, and that he feels its effects pretty strongly. When you have seen him do this it will be small surprise to you that Freddie is in such demand for social functions.

But Freddie is not one of those humourists who perform only when out in society. All day long he is bubbling over with fun. And the beauty of it is that he is not a mere theorist, as a joker; practical--that's Freddie all over.

If he isn't sending long telegrams, collect, to his friends, then he is sending them packages of useless groceries, C. O. D. A telephone is just so much meat to him. I don't believe any one will ever know how much fun Freddie and his friends get out of Freddie's calling them up and making them guess who he is. When he really wants to extend himself he calls up in the middle of the night, and says that he is the wire tester. He uses that one only on special occasions, though. It is pretty elaborate for everyday use.

But day in and day out, you can depend upon it that he is putting over some uproarious trick with a dribble glass or a loaded cigar or a pencil with a rubber point; and you can feel completely sure that no matter where he is or how unexpectedly you may come upon him, Freddie will be right there with a funny line or a comparatively new story for you. That is what people marvel over when they are talking about him--how he is always just the same.

It is right there, really, that they put their finger on the big trouble with him.

But you just ought to meet Freddie sometime. He's a riot, that's what he is--more fun than a circus.

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## THE SHADOW AND THE FLASH

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Moon-Face and Other Stories*, by Jack London

When I look back, I realize what a peculiar friendship it was. First, there was Lloyd Inwood, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and dark. And then Paul Tichlorne, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and blond. Each was the replica of the other in everything except color. Lloyd's eyes were black; Paul's were blue. Under stress of excitement, the blood coursed olive in the face of Lloyd, crimson in the face of Paul. But outside this matter of coloring they were as like as two peas. Both were high-strung, prone to excessive tension and endurance, and they lived at concert pitch.

But there was a trio involved in this remarkable friendship, and the third was short, and fat, and chunky, and lazy, and, loath to say, it was I. Paul and Lloyd seemed born to rivalry with each other, and I to be peacemaker between them. We grew up together, the three of us, and full often have I received the angry blows each intended for the other. They were always competing, striving to outdo each other, and when entered upon some such struggle there was no limit either to their endeavors or passions.

This intense spirit of rivalry obtained in their studies and their games. If Paul memorized one canto of "Marmion," Lloyd memorized two cantos, Paul came back with three, and Lloyd again with four, till each knew the whole poem by heart. I remember an incident that occurred at the swimming hole--an incident tragically significant of the life-struggle between them. The boys had a game of diving to the bottom of a ten-foot pool and holding on by submerged roots to see who could stay under the longest. Paul and Lloyd allowed themselves to be bantered into making the descent together. When I saw their faces, set and determined, disappear in the water as they sank swiftly down, I felt a foreboding of something dreadful. The moments sped, the ripples died away, the face of the pool grew placid and untroubled, and neither black nor golden head broke surface in quest of air. We above grew anxious. The longest record of the longest-winded boy had been exceeded, and



still there was no sign. Air bubbles trickled slowly upward, showing that the breath had been expelled from their lungs, and after that the bubbles ceased to trickle upward. Each second became interminable, and, unable longer to endure the suspense, I plunged into the water.

I found them down at the bottom, clutching tight to the roots, their heads not a foot apart, their eyes wide open, each glaring fixedly at the other. They were suffering frightful torment, writhing and twisting in the pangs of voluntary suffocation; for neither would let go and acknowledge himself beaten. I tried to break Paul's hold on the root, but he resisted me fiercely. Then I lost my breath and came to the surface, badly scared. I quickly explained the situation, and half a dozen of us went down and by main strength tore them loose. By the time we got them out, both were unconscious, and it was only after much barrel-rolling and rubbing and pounding that they finally came to their senses. They would have drowned there, had no one rescued them.

When Paul Tichlorne entered college, he let it be generally understood that he was going in for the social sciences. Lloyd Inwood, entering at the same time, elected to take the same course. But Paul had had it secretly in mind all the time to study the natural sciences, specializing on chemistry, and at the last moment he switched over. Though Lloyd had already arranged his year's work and attended the first lectures, he at once followed Paul's lead and went in for the natural sciences and especially for chemistry. Their rivalry soon became a noted thing throughout the university. Each was a spur to the other, and they went into chemistry deeper than did ever students before--so deep, in fact, that ere they took their sheepskins they could have stumped any chemistry or "cow college" professor in the institution, save "old" Moss, head of the department, and even him they puzzled and edified more than once. Lloyd's discovery of the "death bacillus" of the sea toad, and his experiments on it with potassium cyanide, sent his name and that of his university ringing round the world; nor was Paul a whit behind when he succeeded in producing laboratory colloids exhibiting amoeba-like activities, and when he cast new light upon the processes of fertilization through his startling experiments with simple sodium chlorides and magnesium solutions on low forms of marine life.

It was in their undergraduate days, however, in the midst of their profoundest plunges into the mysteries of organic chemistry, that Doris Van Benschoten entered into their lives. Lloyd met her first, but within twenty-four hours Paul saw to it that he also made her acquaintance. Of course, they fell in love with her, and she became the only thing in life worth living for. They wooed her with equal ardor and fire, and so intense became their struggle for her that half the student-body took to wagering wildly on the result. Even "old" Moss, one day, after an astounding demonstration in his private laboratory by Paul, was guilty to the extent of a month's salary of backing him to become the bridegroom of Doris Van Benschoten.

In the end she solved the problem in her own way, to everybody's satisfaction except Paul's and Lloyd's. Getting them together, she said that she really could not choose between them because she loved them both equally well; and that, unfortunately, since polyandry was not permitted in the United States she would be compelled to forego the honor and happiness of marrying either of them. Each blamed the other for this lamentable outcome, and the bitterness between them grew more bitter.

But things came to a head enough. It was at my home, after they had taken their degrees and dropped out of the world's sight, that the beginning of the end came to pass. Both were men of means, with little inclination and no necessity for professional life. My friendship and their mutual animosity were the two things that linked them in any way together. While they were very often at my place, they made it a fastidious point to avoid each other on such visits, though it was inevitable, under the circumstances, that they should come upon each other occasionally.

On the day I have in recollection, Paul Tichlorne had been mooning all morning in my study over a current scientific review. This left me free to my own affairs, and I was out among my roses when Lloyd Inwood arrived. Clipping and pruning and tacking the climbers on the porch, with my mouth full of nails, and Lloyd following me about and lending a

hand now and again, we fell to discussing the mythical race of invisible people, that strange and vagrant people the traditions of which have come down to us. Lloyd warmed to the talk in his nervous, jerky fashion, and was soon interrogating the physical properties and possibilities of invisibility. A perfectly black object, he contended, would elude and defy the acutest vision.

"Color is a sensation," he was saying. "It has no objective reality. Without light, we can see neither colors nor objects themselves. All objects are black in the dark, and in the dark it is impossible to see them. If no light strikes upon them, then no light is flung back from them to the eye, and so we have no vision-evidence of their being."

"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.

"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them--ay, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say, with the right pigments, properly compounded, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would render invisible whatever it was applied to."

"It would be a remarkable discovery," I said non-committally, for the whole thing seemed too fantastic for aught but speculative purposes.

"Remarkable!" Lloyd slapped me on the shoulder. "I should say so. Why, old chap, to coat myself with such a paint would be to put the world at my feet. The secrets of kings and courts would be mine, the machinations of diplomats and politicians, the play of stock-gamblers, the plans of trusts and corporations. I could keep my hand on the inner pulse of things and become the greatest power in the world. And I--" He broke off shortly, then added, "Well, I have begun my experiments, and I don't mind telling you that I'm right in line for it."

A laugh from the doorway startled us. Paul Tichlorne was standing there, a smile of mockery on his lips.

"You forget, my dear Lloyd," he said.

"Forget what?"

"You forget," Paul went on--"ah, you forget the shadow."

I saw Lloyd's face drop, but he answered sneeringly, "I can carry a sunshade, you know." Then he turned suddenly and fiercely upon him. "Look here, Paul, you'll keep out of this if you know what's good for you."

A rupture seemed imminent, but Paul laughed good-naturedly. "I wouldn't lay fingers on your dirty pigments. Succeed beyond your most sanguine expectations, yet you will always fetch up against the shadow. You can't get away from it. Now I shall go on the very opposite tack. In the very nature of my proposition the shadow will be eliminated--"

"Transparency!" ejaculated Lloyd, instantly. "But it can't be achieved."

"Oh, no; of course not." And Paul shrugged his shoulders and strolled off down the briar-rose path.

This was the beginning of it. Both men attacked the problem with all the tremendous energy for which they were noted, and with a rancor and bitterness that made me tremble for the success of either. Each trusted me to the utmost, and in the long weeks of experimentation that followed I was made a party to both sides, listening to their theorizings and witnessing their demonstrations. Never, by word or sign, did I convey to either the slightest hint of the other's progress, and they respected me for the seal I put upon my lips.

Lloyd Inwood, after prolonged and unintermittent application, when the tension upon his mind and body became too great to bear, had a strange way of obtaining relief. He attended prize fights. It was at one of these brutal exhibitions, whither he had dragged me in order to tell his latest results, that his theory received striking confirmation.

"Do you see that red-whiskered man?" he asked, pointing across the ring to the fifth tier of seats on the opposite side. "And do you see the next man to him, the one in the white hat? Well, there is quite a gap between them, is there not?"

"Certainly," I answered. "They are a seat apart. The gap is the unoccupied seat."

He leaned over to me and spoke seriously. "Between the red-whiskered man and the white-hatted man sits Ben Wasson. You have heard me speak of him. He is the cleverest pugilist of his weight in the country. He is also a Caribbean negro, full-blooded, and the blackest in the United States. He has on a black overcoat buttoned up. I saw him when he came in and took that seat. As soon as he sat down he disappeared. Watch closely; he may smile."

I was for crossing over to verify Lloyd's statement, but he restrained me. "Wait," he said.

I waited and watched, till the red-whiskered man turned his head as though addressing the unoccupied seat; and then, in that empty space, I saw the rolling whites of a pair of eyes and the white double-crescent of two rows of teeth, and for the instant I could make out a negro's face. But with the passing of the smile his visibility passed, and the chair seemed vacant as before.

"Were he perfectly black, you could sit alongside him and not see him," Lloyd said; and I confess the illustration was apt enough to make me well-nigh convinced.

I visited Lloyd's laboratory a number of times after that, and found him always deep in his search after the absolute black. His experiments covered all sorts of pigments, such as lamp-blacks, tars, carbonized vegetable matters, soots of oils and fats, and the various carbonized animal substances.

"White light is composed of the seven primary colors," he argued to me.

"But it is itself, of itself, invisible. Only by being reflected from objects do it and the objects become visible. But only that portion of it that is reflected becomes visible. For instance, here is a blue tobacco-box. The white light strikes against it, and, with one exception, all its component colors--violet, indigo, green, yellow, orange, and red--are absorbed. The one exception is BLUE. It is not absorbed, but reflected. Wherefore the tobacco-box gives us a sensation of blueness. We do not see the other colors because they are absorbed. We see only the blue. For the same reason grass is GREEN. The green waves of white light are thrown upon our eyes."

"When we paint our houses, we do not apply color to them," he said at another time. "What we do is to apply certain substances that have the property of absorbing from white light all the colors except those that we would have our houses appear. When a substance reflects all the colors to the eye, it seems to us white. When it absorbs all the colors, it is black. But, as I said before, we have as yet no perfect black. All the colors are not absorbed. The perfect black, guarding against high lights, will be utterly and absolutely invisible. Look at that, for example."

He pointed to the palette lying on his work-table. Different shades of black pigments were brushed on it. One, in particular, I could hardly see. It gave my eyes a blurring sensation, and I rubbed them and looked again.

"That," he said impressively, "is the blackest black you or any mortal man ever looked upon. But just you wait, and I'll have a black so black that no mortal man will be able to look upon it--and see it!"

On the other hand, I used to find Paul Tichlorne plunged as deeply into the study of light polarization, diffraction, and interference, single and double refraction, and all manner of strange organic compounds.

"Transparency: a state or quality of body which permits all rays of light to pass through," he defined for me. "That is what I am seeking. Lloyd blunders up against the shadow with his perfect opaqueness. But I

escape it. A transparent body casts no shadow; neither does it reflect light-waves--that is, the perfectly transparent does not. So, avoiding high lights, not only will such a body cast no shadow, but, since it reflects no light, it will also be invisible."

We were standing by the window at another time. Paul was engaged in polishing a number of lenses, which were ranged along the sill. Suddenly, after a pause in the conversation, he said, "Oh! I've dropped a lens. Stick your head out, old man, and see where it went to."

Out I started to thrust my head, but a sharp blow on the forehead caused me to recoil. I rubbed my bruised brow and gazed with reproachful inquiry at Paul, who was laughing in gleeful, boyish fashion.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" I echoed.

"Why don't you investigate?" he demanded. And investigate I did. Before thrusting out my head, my senses, automatically active, had told me there was nothing there, that nothing intervened between me and out-of-doors, that the aperture of the window opening was utterly empty. I stretched forth my hand and felt a hard object, smooth and cool and flat, which my touch, out of its experience, told me to be glass. I looked again, but could see positively nothing.

"White quartzose sand," Paul rattled off, "sodic carbonate, slaked lime, cutlet, manganese peroxide--there you have it, the finest French plate glass, made by the great St. Gobain Company, who made the finest plate glass in the world, and this is the finest piece they ever made. It cost a king's ransom. But look at it! You can't see it. You don't know it's there till you run your head against it.

"Eh, old boy! That's merely an object-lesson--certain elements, in themselves opaque, yet so compounded as to give a resultant body which is transparent. But that is a matter of inorganic chemistry, you say. Very true. But I dare to assert, standing here on my two feet, that in

the organic I can duplicate whatever occurs in the inorganic.

"Here!" He held a test-tube between me and the light, and I noted the cloudy or muddy liquid it contained. He emptied the contents of another test-tube into it, and almost instantly it became clear and sparkling.

"Or here!" With quick, nervous movements among his array of test-tubes, he turned a white solution to a wine color, and a light yellow solution to a dark brown. He dropped a piece of litmus paper into an acid, when it changed instantly to red, and on floating it in an alkali it turned as quickly to blue.

"The litmus paper is still the litmus paper," he enunciated in the formal manner of the lecturer. "I have not changed it into something else. Then what did I do? I merely changed the arrangement of its molecules. Where, at first, it absorbed all colors from the light but red, its molecular structure was so changed that it absorbed red and all colors except blue. And so it goes, ad infinitum. Now, what I purpose to do is this." He paused for a space. "I purpose to seek--ay, and to find--the proper reagents, which, acting upon the living organism, will bring about molecular changes analogous to those you have just witnessed. But these reagents, which I shall find, and for that matter, upon which I already have my hands, will not turn the living body to blue or red or black, but they will turn it to transparency. All light will pass through it. It will be invisible. It will cast no shadow."

A few weeks later I went hunting with Paul. He had been promising me for some time that I should have the pleasure of shooting over a wonderful dog--the most wonderful dog, in fact, that ever man shot over, so he averred, and continued to aver till my curiosity was aroused. But on the morning in question I was disappointed, for there was no dog in evidence.

"Don't see him about," Paul remarked unconcernedly, and we set off across the fields.

I could not imagine, at the time, what was ailing me, but I had a



feeling of some impending and deadly illness. My nerves were all awry, and, from the astounding tricks they played me, my senses seemed to have run riot. Strange sounds disturbed me. At times I heard the swish-swish of grass being shoved aside, and once the patter of feet across a patch of stony ground.

"Did you hear anything, Paul?" I asked once.

But he shook his head, and thrust his feet steadily forward.

While climbing a fence, I heard the low, eager whine of a dog, apparently from within a couple of feet of me; but on looking about me I saw nothing.

I dropped to the ground, limp and trembling.

"Paul," I said, "we had better return to the house. I am afraid I am going to be sick."

"Nonsense, old man," he answered. "The sunshine has gone to your head like wine. You'll be all right. It's famous weather."

But, passing along a narrow path through a clump of cottonwoods, some object brushed against my legs and I stumbled and nearly fell. I looked with sudden anxiety at Paul.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Tripping over your own feet?"

I kept my tongue between my teeth and plodded on, though sore perplexed and thoroughly satisfied that some acute and mysterious malady had attacked my nerves. So far my eyes had escaped; but, when we got to the open fields again, even my vision went back on me. Strange flashes of vari-colored, rainbow light began to appear and disappear on the path before me. Still, I managed to keep myself in hand, till the vari-colored lights persisted for a space of fully twenty seconds, dancing and flashing in continuous play. Then I sat down, weak and shaky.

"It's all up with me," I gasped, covering my eyes with my hands. "It has attacked my eyes. Paul, take me home."

But Paul laughed long and loud. "What did I tell you?--the most wonderful dog, eh? Well, what do you think?"

He turned partly from me and began to whistle. I heard the patter of feet, the panting of a heated animal, and the unmistakable yelp of a dog. Then Paul stooped down and apparently fondled the empty air.

"Here! Give me your fist."

And he rubbed my hand over the cold nose and jowls of a dog. A dog it certainly was, with the shape and the smooth, short coat of a pointer.

Suffice to say, I speedily recovered my spirits and control. Paul put a collar about the animal's neck and tied his handkerchief to its tail. And then was vouchsafed us the remarkable sight of an empty collar and a waving handkerchief cavorting over the fields. It was something to see that collar and handkerchief pin a bevy of quail in a clump of locusts and remain rigid and immovable till we had flushed the birds.

Now and again the dog emitted the vari-colored light-flashes I have mentioned. The one thing, Paul explained, which he had not anticipated and which he doubted could be overcome.

"They're a large family," he said, "these sun dogs, wind dogs, rainbows, halos, and parhelia. They are produced by refraction of light from mineral and ice crystals, from mist, rain, spray, and no end of things; and I am afraid they are the penalty I must pay for transparency. I escaped Lloyd's shadow only to fetch up against the rainbow flash."

A couple of days later, before the entrance to Paul's laboratory, I encountered a terrible stench. So overpowering was it that it was easy to discover the source--a mass of putrescent matter on the doorstep which in general outlines resembled a dog.

Paul was startled when he investigated my find. It was his invisible dog, or rather, what had been his invisible dog, for it was now plainly visible. It had been playing about but a few minutes before in all health and strength. Closer examination revealed that the skull had been crushed by some heavy blow. While it was strange that the animal should have been killed, the inexplicable thing was that it should so quickly decay.

"The reagents I injected into its system were harmless," Paul explained. "Yet they were powerful, and it appears that when death comes they force practically instantaneous disintegration. Remarkable! Most remarkable! Well, the only thing is not to die. They do not harm so long as one lives. But I do wonder who smashed in that dog's head."

Light, however, was thrown upon this when a frightened housemaid brought the news that Gaffer Bedshaw had that very morning, not more than an hour back, gone violently insane, and was strapped down at home, in the huntsman's lodge, where he raved of a battle with a ferocious and gigantic beast that he had encountered in the Tichlorne pasture. He claimed that the thing, whatever it was, was invisible, that with his own eyes he had seen that it was invisible; wherefore his tearful wife and daughters shook their heads, and wherefore he but waxed the more violent, and the gardener and the coachman tightened the straps by another hole.

Nor, while Paul Tichlorne was thus successfully mastering the problem of invisibility, was Lloyd Inwood a whit behind. I went over in answer to a message of his to come and see how he was getting on. Now his laboratory occupied an isolated situation in the midst of his vast grounds. It was built in a pleasant little glade, surrounded on all sides by a dense forest growth, and was to be gained by way of a winding and erratic path. But I have travelled that path so often as to know every foot of it, and conceive my surprise when I came upon the glade and found no laboratory. The quaint shed structure with its red sandstone chimney was not. Nor did it look as if it ever had been. There were no signs of ruin, no debris, nothing.

I started to walk across what had once been its site. "This," I said to myself, "should be where the step went up to the door." Barely were the words out of my mouth when I stubbed my toe on some obstacle, pitched forward, and butted my head into something that FELT very much like a door. I reached out my hand. It WAS a door. I found the knob and turned it. And at once, as the door swung inward on its hinges, the whole interior of the laboratory impinged upon my vision. Greeting Lloyd, I closed the door and backed up the path a few paces. I could see nothing of the building. Returning and opening the door, at once all the furniture and every detail of the interior were visible. It was indeed startling, the sudden transition from void to light and form and color.

"What do you think of it, eh?" Lloyd asked, wringing my hand. "I slapped a couple of coats of absolute black on the outside yesterday afternoon to see how it worked. How's your head? you bumped it pretty solidly, I imagine."

"Never mind that," he interrupted my congratulations. "I've something better for you to do."

While he talked he began to strip, and when he stood naked before me he thrust a pot and brush into my hand and said, "Here, give me a coat of this."

It was an oily, shellac-like stuff, which spread quickly and easily over the skin and dried immediately.

"Merely preliminary and precautionary," he explained when I had finished; "but now for the real stuff."

I picked up another pot he indicated, and glanced inside, but could see nothing.

"It's empty," I said.

"Stick your finger in it."

I obeyed, and was aware of a sensation of cool moistness. On withdrawing my hand I glanced at the forefinger, the one I had immersed, but it had disappeared. I moved and knew from the alternate tension and relaxation of the muscles that I moved it, but it defied my sense of sight. To all appearances I had been shorn of a finger; nor could I get any visual impression of it till I extended it under the skylight and saw its shadow plainly blotted on the floor.

Lloyd chuckled. "Now spread it on, and keep your eyes open."

I dipped the brush into the seemingly empty pot, and gave him a long stroke across his chest. With the passage of the brush the living flesh disappeared from beneath. I covered his right leg, and he was a one-legged man defying all laws of gravitation. And so, stroke by stroke, member by member, I painted Lloyd Inwood into nothingness. It was a creepy experience, and I was glad when naught remained in sight but his burning black eyes, poised apparently unsupported in mid-air.

"I have a refined and harmless solution for them," he said. "A fine spray with an air-brush, and presto! I am not."

This deftly accomplished, he said, "Now I shall move about, and do you tell me what sensations you experience."

"In the first place, I cannot see you," I said, and I could hear his gleeful laugh from the midst of the emptiness. "Of course," I continued, "you cannot escape your shadow, but that was to be expected. When you pass between my eye and an object, the object disappears, but so unusual and incomprehensible is its disappearance that it seems to me as though my eyes had blurred. When you move rapidly, I experience a bewildering succession of blurs. The blurring sensation makes my eyes ache and my brain tired."

"Have you any other warnings of my presence?" he asked.

"No, and yes," I answered. "When you are near me I have feelings similar

to those produced by dank warehouses, gloomy crypts, and deep mines. And as sailors feel the loom of the land on dark nights, so I think I feel the loom of your body. But it is all very vague and intangible."

Long we talked that last morning in his laboratory; and when I turned to go, he put his unseen hand in mine with nervous grip, and said, "Now I shall conquer the world!" And I could not dare to tell him of Paul Tichlorne's equal success.

At home I found a note from Paul, asking me to come up immediately, and it was high noon when I came spinning up the driveway on my wheel. Paul called me from the tennis court, and I dismounted and went over. But the court was empty. As I stood there, gaping open-mouthed, a tennis ball struck me on the arm, and as I turned about, another whizzed past my ear. For aught I could see of my assailant, they came whirling at me from out of space, and right well was I peppered with them. But when the balls already flung at me began to come back for a second whack, I realized the situation. Seizing a racquet and keeping my eyes open, I quickly saw a rainbow flash appearing and disappearing and darting over the ground. I took out after it, and when I laid the racquet upon it for a half-dozen stout blows, Paul's voice rang out:

"Enough! Enough! Oh! Ouch! Stop! You're landing on my naked skin, you know! Ow! O-w-w! I'll be good! I'll be good! I only wanted you to see my metamorphosis," he said ruefully, and I imagined he was rubbing his hurts.

A few minutes later we were playing tennis--a handicap on my part, for I could have no knowledge of his position save when all the angles between himself, the sun, and me, were in proper conjunction. Then he flashed, and only then. But the flashes were more brilliant than the rainbow--purest blue, most delicate violet, brightest yellow, and all the intermediary shades, with the scintillant brilliancy of the diamond, dazzling, blinding, iridescent.

But in the midst of our play I felt a sudden cold chill, reminding me of deep mines and gloomy crypts, such a chill as I had experienced that

very morning. The next moment, close to the net, I saw a ball rebound in mid-air and empty space, and at the same instant, a score of feet away, Paul Tichlorne emitted a rainbow flash. It could not be he from whom the ball had rebounded, and with sickening dread I realized that Lloyd Inwood had come upon the scene. To make sure, I looked for his shadow, and there it was, a shapeless blotch the girth of his body, (the sun was overhead), moving along the ground. I remembered his threat, and felt sure that all the long years of rivalry were about to culminate in uncanny battle.

I cried a warning to Paul, and heard a snarl as of a wild beast, and an answering snarl. I saw the dark blotch move swiftly across the court, and a brilliant burst of vari-colored light moving with equal swiftness to meet it; and then shadow and flash came together and there was the sound of unseen blows. The net went down before my frightened eyes. I sprang toward the fighters, crying:

"For God's sake!"

But their locked bodies smote against my knees, and I was overthrown.

"You keep out of this, old man!" I heard the voice of Lloyd Inwood from out of the emptiness. And then Paul's voice crying, "Yes, we've had enough of peacemaking!"

From the sound of their voices I knew they had separated. I could not locate Paul, and so approached the shadow that represented Lloyd. But from the other side came a stunning blow on the point of my jaw, and I heard Paul scream angrily, "Now will you keep away?"

Then they came together again, the impact of their blows, their groans and gasps, and the swift flashings and shadow-movings telling plainly of the deadliness of the struggle.

I shouted for help, and Gaffer Bedshaw came running into the court. I could see, as he approached, that he was looking at me strangely, but he collided with the combatants and was hurled headlong to the ground. With

despairing shriek and a cry of "O Lord, I've got 'em!" he sprang to his feet and tore madly out of the court.

I could do nothing, so I sat up, fascinated and powerless, and watched the struggle. The noonday sun beat down with dazzling brightness on the naked tennis court. And it was naked. All I could see was the blotch of shadow and the rainbow flashes, the dust rising from the invisible feet, the earth tearing up from beneath the straining foot-grips, and the wire screen bulge once or twice as their bodies hurled against it. That was all, and after a time even that ceased. There were no more flashes, and the shadow had become long and stationary; and I remembered their set boyish faces when they clung to the roots in the deep coolness of the pool.

They found me an hour afterward. Some inkling of what had happened got to the servants and they quitted the Tichlorne service in a body. Gaffer Bedshaw never recovered from the second shock he received, and is confined in a madhouse, hopelessly incurable. The secrets of their marvellous discoveries died with Paul and Lloyd, both laboratories being destroyed by grief-stricken relatives. As for myself, I no longer care for chemical research, and science is a tabooed topic in my household. I have returned to my roses. Nature's colors are good enough for me.